Prometheus Unbound

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in 1792 in West Sussex, England. His parents were wealthy landowners and Shelley spent much of his early childhood outdoors in the English countryside. When he was ten years old, he was sent to Eton College to be educated. A studious and solitary child, Shelley was bullied relentlessly by his classmates during his time at Eton. He enrolled at Oxford University in 1810 where he developed his interest in writing and literature, despite rarely attending lectures. During his time at Oxford, Shelley began to experiment with writing novels and poetry and also to develop an interest in politics. He was expelled from Oxford in 1811 for writing a pamphlet called "The Necessity of Atheism," which was highly critical of the Church. After his expulsion, which caused a rift between Shelley and his father, Shelley eloped with Harriet Westbrook, a sixteen-year old girl who had become infatuated with him. Their marriage was unhappy however, and Shelley continued to court relationships with other women throughout this period. Shelley also began to spend time with William Godwin, a political writer whom Shelley considered his mentor and who had been married to the famous feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft before her death. Shelley left Harriet and their daughter, Ianthe, in 1814 while Harriet was pregnant with their second child and entered a relationship with William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter, Mary, whom Shelley eventually married in 1816 after Harriet committed suicide. Percy and Mary Shelley travelled widely in Europe, spending time with Shelley's friend, the famous poet Lord Byron, who was also the lover of Mary's sister, Claire. Due to the fallout with his family, Shelley was often very poor and, although he was a prolific writer, his poetry was not a commercial success during his lifetime. His marriage to Mary was tumultuous and Shelley continued to have affairs throughout. The couple had two children, both of whom died in infancy, and an adopted daughter who also died very young. Shelley died in 1822 at age twenty-nine, when his boat sank in stormy weather off the Italian coast.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Romanticism was a direct reaction to the effects of new technology and industrialization, which was increasing at an unprecedented rate throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was also a reaction against the general societal interest in rationality, reason, and empirical observation of the natural world, with a view to harnessing nature for industrial production. This period, which spanned most of the eighteenth century in Europe, was known as the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason and was a period of intense scientific and technological development that paved the way for modern industry and capitalism. Romanticism, as a literary movement, began towards the end of the eighteenth century with the work of writers such as William Blake, who criticized the damaging effects of industrialization on rural areas. With increased industrialization in cities, many people moved away from the countryside to work in factories in urban centers. Quality of life in these cities was very poor and unsanitary, and the Romantics felt that people would be happier and healthier if they spent more time in nature. Shelley and the Romantics were suspicious of Enlightenment attitudes towards scientific exploration and felt that the Enlightenment's focus on empirical observation of nature, rather than *appreciation* of nature, led to destructive tendencies among people who sought to use nature for profit or production without understanding the consequences of this behavior on the natural world. The Romantics were also radical thinkers in terms of their views on religion and politics. Shelley was an atheist and despised established institutions such as the Church, the Monarchy, and the institution of marriage. Shelley and the Romantics were inspired by the French Revolution, which took place between 1789 and 1799, in which the French monarchy were overthrown and executed because of their negligent attitudes toward the poor. Although the French Revolution devolved into tyranny, with a peasant mob executing thousands of people during the Reign of Terror, the Romantics were inspired by the political philosophy of individual freedom and rebellion against corrupt establishments that was central to revolutionary thought.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Prometheus Unbound is an example of an epic poem. Epic poetry borrowed themes from classical, Greek epics, such as *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey* by Homer, which focus on subjects like fate, heroism, conflict between mortals and deities, military combat, and journeys into other realms. Classical epics were rooted in Greek mythology and featured classical gods and heroes, while Christian epics such as *The Divine Comedy*, written in 1472 by Dante Alighieri, blend epic themes with Christian belief and theology. *Prometheus Unbound* makes use of Christian allegory throughout, though the story of Prometheus was originally written down by Greek authors such as Hesiod and the playwright Aeschylus. Shelley's poem is specifically based on a fragment from a lost play by Aeschylus. Shelley was heavily influenced by John Milton's characterization of Satan in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, as can been seen in Shelley's in the depiction of Prometheus as a

rebellious hero who refuses to bow to a supreme authority. In this sense, Shelley is similar to Romantic poets such as William Blake, who depicted the Christian God as a tyrant and Satan as a spirit of knowledge and freedom in his 1793 illustrated poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Shelley was also directly influenced by, and directly influential on, the works of his friend Lord Byron. Byron used a Promethean Romantic hero character so often in his own poems like *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* or *Don Juan* that this type of character came to be referred to as the "Byronic hero." In his use of nature imagery and insinuations of nature worship, Shelley is also reminiscent of fellow Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Shelley's work was also influential on later, Victorian poets such as the Pre-Raphaelite group, which includes poets like William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rosetti. The Pre-Raphaelites were interested in depicting a pre-Renaissance, medieval world in their work because, like Shelley, they felt that the emphasis on rationalism and the scientific developments of the Enlightenment period had produced a detrimental effect on society and on man's relationship with nature. *Prometheus Unbound* also inspired political writers such as Karl Marx and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as well as novelists like Leo Tolstoy, with its message of equality, liberty, and alleviation of suffering for the poor.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Prometheus Unbound
- **When Written:** 1818
- **Where Written:** Italy
- **When Published:** 1820
- **Literary Period:** Romanticism
- **Genre:** Epic poetry
- **Setting:** A mountain and a valley in the Indian Caucuses, the underground realm of the Demogorgon, and Heaven.
- **Climax:** Prometheus, a Titan who has been bound to a mountain for all eternity by the tyrant Jupiter as punishment for giving humanity fire, is freed by Hercules, fulfilling a prophecy which predicts the end of Jupiter's authoritarian reign over Earth and which frees humanity from the bonds of ignorance, suffering, and mortality.
- **Antagonist:** Jupiter

EXTRA CREDIT

Julian and Maddalo. In 1818, the same year that he wrote *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley spent a great deal of time in Italy with his close friend and fellow author Lord Byron. The pair discussed the social, political, and aesthetic subjects which feature in *Prometheus Unbound*, as well as in Byron's own epic poems. Shelley chronicled these discussions with Byron in his poem *Julian and Maddalo*, about two friends who explore Venice while discussing social causes.

Ireland. Shelley visited Ireland in 1812, when Ireland was under British rule, and was horrified by the poor living conditions he saw. He wrote a pamphlet entitled "An Address to the Irish People," which he sold at a low price and distributed by throwing copies of it from his balcony. This was seen as an act of extreme rebellion by the British government, who were interested in uniting Ireland under British rule, and gained Shelley a reputation as an anti-establishment figure.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Titan Prometheus has been chained to a precipice in the Indian Caucuses for all eternity by the tyrant god Jupiter, as punishment for giving humanity the gift of fire. He has been imprisoned for three thousand years thus far, and every day an eagle is sent by Jupiter to peck out his organs, which grow back overnight.

A night, the sea nymphs Panthea and Ione—daughters of the Ocean and sisters of Prometheus's wife, Asia—watch over Prometheus from the mountainside. Prometheus defiantly address Jupiter and tells him that, although Jupiter has supreme power over all the world, Prometheus does not envy him and would rather be chained to the mountain than reigning like Jupiter in Heaven. Although Prometheus cursed Jupiter when he was first bound, he has since forgotten the curse and asks the elements around him to remind him what he said. The elements admit that they remember his curse but are too afraid to repeat it. The Earth then speaks to Prometheus. She tells him that she is his mother and that his birth brought great joy to her as well as hope to mankind. Since his capture, however, the Earth has been sick with grief, sprouting poisonous plants and producing noxious vapors that have caused plague and famine among humanity.

The Earth calls up the Phantasm of Jupiter from the shadow world to repeat the curse for Prometheus, as the Earth does not dare repeat it herself for fear that Jupiter will punish her. The Phantasm of Jupiter approaches and Panthea and Ione cower before it, frightened by its likeness to the real Jupiter. The Phantasm repeats the curse, in which Prometheus states that he is the only being who will not bow to Jupiter and invites Jupiter to punish him as much as he likes because nothing the god does will make Prometheus respect his power. In his curse, Prometheus also hopes that Jupiter's power will cause Jupiter suffering that outweighs the benefits he reaps from making himself the supreme authority.

After the Phantasm vanishes, Prometheus laments that he had wished pain upon another being. When she hears this, the Earth cries out that Prometheus has been conquered and that he is now a slave to Jupiter's power. Ione, however, is confident

that this is just a "passing spasm" and points out that the messenger God, Mercury, is flying towards them through the breaking dawn, followed by the Furies, monsters from the world of the dead and servants of Jupiter.

Mercury has been sent by Jupiter to make a deal with Prometheus, which will allow Jupiter to keep his power but give Prometheus his freedom. Prometheus rejects his offer and tells Mercury that he will never stop resisting Jupiter because Jupiter has enslaved the world and humanity. Mercury begs Prometheus to accept because he does not wish to watch Prometheus suffer, but Prometheus steadfastly refuses and tells Mercury to let the Furies at him.

Mercury sadly departs and the Furies attack Prometheus, taunting him with visions of suffering and cruelty acted out by humanity. They tell him that, although he has tried to help humanity by giving them fire, they have turned on each other with acts of violence, malice, and war. One man tried to preach a message of hope and peace, the Furies say, but his message was abused and distorted. Prometheus weeps for this man but refuses to speak his name, which he feels has now become a curse. The Furies vanish and Prometheus says that their torture has only increased his determination to defy Jupiter because it has shown him the terrible suffering on earth under Jupiter's reign. The Earth then calls up a chorus of good spirits to comfort Prometheus. These spirits speak of a prophecy foretelling that Prometheus will kill death and bring new hope to humanity. Panthea tells Prometheus that he is deeply loved before she leaves to visit his wife, Asia, who is waiting in the valley below.

Panthea arrives just after sunrise and tells Asia that she is late because she was having strange dreams. Upon telling Asia that she cannot remember one of the dreams, Asia looks into her eyes, trying to divine the dream there, and is startled to see a shape beckoning her to follow. Panthea feels it too and cries out that it is her dream. The two nymphs follow the dream to the opening of a cave. A chorus of voices spur them on, and the two nymphs sink down, overcome by weakness, into the abyss, which is the entrance to the lair of the Demogorgon.

Panthea and Asia confront the Demogorgon on his throne and find that he is a shapeless spirit made of darkness. Asia explains to the Demogorgon that, when Prometheus first gave Jupiter knowledge, he gave it to him on the condition that Jupiter would "let man be free." Jupiter however, enslaved mankind. Prometheus gave humanity fire in retaliation, so that they could tame the brutal environment that Jupiter had created for them. Jupiter then chained Prometheus to the mountain as punishment.

The Demogorgon tells Asia that all things in the universe "are subject to Eternal love," and shows the nymphs a series of chariots racing around the earth's perimeter. The Demogorgon says that these are the Spirits of the Hours and that one among them, who flies on a different route, is the Spirit of Love. The Demogorgon takes them to meet one Hour, the shadow of a destiny, who awaits them. The sea nymphs and the Demogorgon get into the chariot and ascend towards Heaven.

In Heaven, Jupiter is celebrating with the other gods. Although, he has not yet dominated the will of Prometheus, he is confident that he soon be omnipotent because he and the goddess, Thetis, have produced a child who is mightier yet than him. This child is the Demogorgon, who arrives in Heaven in the chariot of the Hour as Jupiter speaks. Jupiter is terrified when he sees the Demogorgon, who drags Jupiter down into his lair, ending his reign. Ocean and Apollo, the sun god, stand amazed as they watch Jupiter's fall. They rejoice that they will no longer have to witness suffering on earth because the tyrant has been defeated.

Hercules frees Prometheus, and he is reunited with Ione, Panthea, and Asia. Prometheus tells Asia that there is a beautiful cave in which they will live together. He reminds Ione of a gift which Asia received on her wedding day, a shell which produces lovely music when blown, and tells her to give it to the Spirit of the Hour. He asks the Spirit of the Hour to fly around the world, sounding the shell, and the Earth delights that she can feel herself coming back to life now that Prometheus is free. She calls up a messenger, the Spirit of the Earth, to lead them to the cave which will be their dwelling.

The Spirit of the Earth calls Asia "mother" and talks with her playfully, telling her about the change which she has witnessed in the world since Prometheus has been free. The Spirit tells Asia that, as she was walking in a city, she heard a sweet music sounding in the night and all the people rushed outside to hear it. She watched as the people transformed, becoming joyful and filled with love. The Spirit of the Hour returns and tells them that he has done his job. He remarks on the transformation which has taken place among mankind, saying he has seen all the monuments of power abandoned and the courts of kings and rulers "unregarded" because man has no need for them.

Panthea and Ione go to sleep outside the cave of Asia and Prometheus. They wake to singing and witness the dead spirits of the Hours dancing in a funeral procession for the King of the Hours. They then witness a vision in which they see all the trappings of worldly power deserted and forgotten, as though at the bottom of the sea. As the Moon talks with the now gleeful Earth, water flows and plants begin to grow on the Moon's surface. The Earth and the Moon rejoice at this new life and, from the deep, the voice of the Demogorgon sounds across the universe, spreading a message of "Love, Joy, Victory, and Empire."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Prometheus – Prometheus is the protagonist and hero of

Prometheus Unbound. In Shelley's poem, Prometheus is a Titan (within Greek mythology, Titans are children of the Earth who are often in conflict with the classical gods) who has been punished by Jupiter for providing humanity with the gift of fire, which represents knowledge. As punishment for his transgression, Jupiter sentences Prometheus to be bound to a mountain for eternity. Shelley's Prometheus is a defiant, independent, and selfless character who is prepared to resist the despotic Jupiter regardless of the consequences. Prometheus views his supposed transgression—that is, giving humans fire—as morally correct because be believes that knowledge can alleviate suffering on earth and help humans navigate their environment. This emphasizes Prometheus as an independent thinker who does not automatically bow to authority if he feels that it is corrupt. Even as he values his ability to make his own judgements, however, he does not crave power to influence other people's and sacrifices his well-being for the greater good. Notably, when Jupiter offers him a truce at humanity's expense, Prometheus refuses and claims that he would rather be punished than compromise his values for the sake of personal gain. Although Prometheus is a very defiant character, he learns forgiveness and compassion during his punishment and even comes to pity Jupiter, who he believes must be unhappy in his all-consuming pursuit of power. This supports Shelley's characterization of Prometheus as a kind and selfless figure who is willing to suffer the loss of his own freedom for the sake of others'.

Jupiter – Jupiter is the villain or antagonist of *Prometheus Unbound*, the ruler of the Heavens, the Earth, the natural elements, and humanity. In Roman mythology, Jupiter was the ruler of the Gods and equivalent of the Greek Zeus. In Shelley's poem, Jupiter has reigned as the supreme authority since Prometheus's capture. Readers learn about Jupiter through the other character's reactions to him as well as through the Phantasm of Jupiter, which is called up to reveal Prometheus's curse. The Earth and other natural elements live in fear of Jupiter, suggesting that he is a cruel tyrant. This is further demonstrated when the Earth tells Prometheus that Jupiter has attached her to a "wheel of pain," forcing her to orbit round the sun. While Prometheus views fire as beneficial to humanity, Jupiter feels threatened that humanity's knowledge may lead them to question his authority. This shows that Jupiter is a totalitarian leader who does not believe in freedom of thought or information and is afraid of losing his power. He is willing to be cruel and violent towards anyone who opposes him and to keep humanity in servitude, despite the suffering this causes. In this regard he is the opposite of Prometheus, who is willing to suffer so that others might be free. Although Jupiter is very powerful, he is portrayed as very cowardly, hiding behind the Furies he sends to punish Prometheus, and living in constant fear of having his authority stripped from him.

Asia – Asia is Prometheus's wife, an Oceanid (otherwise known in classical mythology as a daughter of the Ocean, or a sea nymph), and the sister of Panthea and Ione. Asia as portrayed by Shelley is deeply connected to the natural world and affected by wrongs done to it. She mourns the loss of her husband, who she fears will be bound forever. During the poem, Asia is transformed from a figure in mourning with little hope into an emblem of love returning to the world upon Jupiter's fall and Prometheus's release. This supports her association with spring as it suggests the world being brought back to life after the winter of Jupiter's reign. Asia is also associated with the Spirit of Love and the classical goddess of love, Venus, as she is described as riding in an "ivory shell" on the ocean. This was a common image which depicted the birth of Venus and links Asia to the Spirit of Love's chariot, which is an "ivory shell." A shell is also used as a horn at the end of the poem, when the Spirit of the Hour flies around the world spreading the music of love from Asia's enchanted shell, which was given to her as a wedding present. Asia is called "mother" by the Spirit of the Earth, who is a symbol of nature, and which suggests that the union between Prometheus, who is a symbol of knowledge, and Asia, who is a symbol of love, presents a new hope for nature and invigorates the connection between man and the natural world.

Panthea – An Oceanid, or sea nymph, Panthea is the daughter of the Ocean and the sister of Asia and Ione. Panthea is depicted as loving and protective of her sisters and shows great compassion for Prometheus during his punishment, despite the fact that watching him suffer is very difficult for her. Although it is painful for Panthea to see Prometheus being tortured, she and Ione stay near him on the mountaintop, both to offer him comfort and for the sake of their sister Asia, who is Prometheus's wife. Panthea travels with Asia down into the realm of the Demogorgon, demonstrating her bravery. Panthea's name is also symbolic as it is closely linked to Pan, a pagan nature god, and the word "pantheism," which refers to a type of pagan nature worship in which Shelley and the Romantics were interested.

Ione – Ione is an Oceanid, or sea nymph, and is the daughter of the Ocean and the sister of Panthea and Asia. Like Panthea and Asia, Ione is portrayed as a compassionate nature spirit who is deeply affected by the punishment of Prometheus. Ione is portrayed as younger and more childlike than Panthea and Asia. She is described sleeping in an underwater cave with Panthea, with her arms wrapped around her sister like a child, and her role in the plot is less central than the role assigned to Panthea and Asia as she is not party to the dreams that they share and does not accompany them to visit the Demogorgon. Instead, Ione is depicted as a passive observer of Prometheus's torture, one who is sympathetic with Prometheus's struggle but who can do little to affect the outcome of events. She and Panthea provide a perspective through which the reader can witness Prometheus's struggle as he is tormented by Furies and

soothed by good spirits sent by the Earth, while he is chained to the mountain in Act 1.

Mercury – Mercury is a messenger God sent by Jupiter to seek a compromise with Prometheus during his imprisonment on the mountain, as Panthea and Ione watch from a nearby peak. Mercury is portrayed as a well-meaning but weak character. It is painful for him to see Prometheus suffer and he shows disdain for the Furies, who are waiting eagerly for Prometheus to reject Jupiter's compromise so that they can torture him. Mercury pleads with Prometheus to accept Jupiter's offer and this demonstrates that Mercury, unlike Prometheus, sees the value in negotiation and reaching an agreement which, to an extent, pleases both parties. Prometheus, however, views this course of action as self-serving, implicitly suggesting Mercury's willingness to value personal gain over the greater good. Mercury's weakness thus serves to highlight Prometheus's strength, in that he is willing to sacrifice his own wellbeing for the sake of humanity even though an escape from his torment has been offered. Mercury is clearly a powerful God, as he is the messenger for Jupiter and is able to frighten and hold off the Furies. His decision to work for rather than resist Jupiter, therefore, can be viewed as a personal weakness rather than a lack of knowledge or power. Shelley's depiction of Mercury draws upon Roman mythology, in which Mercury is a messenger god who negotiates between the realm of gods and the human world. He also frequently represents commerce, trade, and negotiation in classical stories.

Demogorgon – The Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound* is a spirit of the underworld, associated with the realm of night or the world of the dead in pagan mythology. He represents an eternal force in nature which cannot change the course of history but is privy to some secrets of destiny and fate. He is the child of Jupiter and the goddess Thetis, whom Jupiter has raped; the Demogorgon is more powerful than both his parents, as their powers have combined in him. When confronted by Panthea and Asia, who have been led to the underworld by a dream, the Demogorgon reveals that Jupiter, although he reigns supreme over earth and Heaven, is still subject to the spirit of Love, whom "everything in the universe is subject to." The Demogorgon travels with Asia and Panthea to Heaven and topples Jupiter down into the abyss, thus ending the God's reign. Demogorgon is reminiscent of the character of Death from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the child of Satan and Sin and who inhabits the vast realm of Night between Hell and the Earth. The Demogorgon is also associated with fate or destiny in Shelley's poem and is described as the "doom which lies coiled under the throne of Jupiter," suggesting that Jupiter's downfall has always been inevitable and that the God's attempts to cling to power are futile.

The Earth – The Earth is personified in *Prometheus Unbound* as a mother grieving for her child, Prometheus, and for her inhabitants, humanity. At the beginning of the poem, the Earth is fearful about what will become of her and the inhabitants of the planet if they further offend Jupiter. She fears being tortured further (describing her route around the sun as a "wheel of pain" which Jupiter has "linked" her to). When Prometheus asks to hear the curse that he'd uttered against Jupiter but that he has now forgotten, the Earth calls up the Phantasm of Jupiter from the shadow realm so that Jupiter's rage will "sweep through" the realm of phantoms rather than affect those who are alive on the Earth. The Earth's grief over the treatment of Prometheus is described as the "poisoned breath" of a mother grieving her child and, as a result of the Earth's pain, humanity too has suffered. "Poisonous weeds" have sprung up alongside nutritious plants and humans have struggled to live in harmony with nature since Jupiter imprisoned Prometheus. As Jupiter's reign has stripped humanity of their ability to use the knowledge that Prometheus gave them, human beings have damaged the Earth in their attempts to control their environment; the Earth suffers under the violence that man does to each other and that they do to the environment through industry and the building of cities. The personification of the Earth in Shelley's poem has its roots in Greek mythology, in which the Earth was symbolized by a goddess called Gaia. It also highlights Shelley's belief in pantheism, or nature worship, as well as the importance of respecting and maintaining a harmonious balance with nature rather than stripping the Earth of resources for the sake of industrialization.

The Spirit of the Earth – The Spirit of the Earth is a childlike spirit who was very fond of Asia, Prometheus's wife, before the corruption of Jupiter's reign. She used to play with and confide in Asia, whom she called "mother." During Jupiter's reign, in which man's relationship with nature was damaged, Asia notes that she has not seen the Spirit of the Earth. Once Prometheus is freed, Jupiter is toppled, and man's harmonious relationship with nature is restored, the Spirit of the Earth is set free once more and runs careless and wild through the world. It is implied that the Spirit of the Earth is the child of Asia and Prometheus. This suggests that the union of knowledge, symbolized by Prometheus, and love, symbolized by Asia, creates greater communion with nature among mankind. The Spirit of the Earth is associated with appreciation of and freedom in nature, reflecting Shelley's belief that time spent in nature was extremely important for man's wellbeing.

The Furies – The Furies are spirits from Hell who are sent by Jupiter to torment Prometheus while he is chained to the mountain. The Furies mock and torment Prometheus with visions of humanity's demise under Jupiter's reign. They are disdainful of all compassion, love, and of Prometheus's care for humans and morality. Although the Furies can invade Prometheus's body and mind to torture him, their power is depicted as illusory and reliant, in part, on a façade. When the Furies are taunting Prometheus about the punishments which

they intend to enact on him, one mentions the horrors of Hell that await him. This Fury is quickly hushed by another, as they say that it is better for Prometheus to imagine the powers of Hell rather than know them. This suggests that Hell's power is weak and relies on the anticipation of horror to frighten people into compliance, rather than wielding real power. In contrast, the Spirit of Love in the poem is depicted as a power which cannot be resisted and which "everything in the universe is subject to." The Furies are also subject to Jupiter and easily held back by Mercury, which suggests that they are servants of power rather powerful beings themselves. Like all the evil beings in Shelley's poem, the Furies cannot be truly happy because they are enslaved rather than free.

Hercules – Hercules is a demigod (half mortal and half god) who frees Prometheus from his chains on the mountain, where he has been imprisoned by the tyrant God Jupiter. In Roman mythology Hercules is the son of Jupiter and a mortal woman, Alcmene, and is a hero who performs many superhuman feats. It was common in epics and classical mythology for authors to include cameos by famous heroes in their stories; Shelley continues this tradition by including the famous figure of Hercules briefly in his narrative but expands very little on Hercules's actions within the poem.

Apollo – Apollo is the sun god, in both Greek and Roman mythology, who witnesses the fall of Jupiter after Prometheus has been set free. Apollo, like all the gods and natural forces in Shelley's poem, has been enslaved by Jupiter and is grateful to see the end of Jupiter's reign. Conversing with Ocean, the personification of and god of the sea, Apollo expresses his delight that he will no longer have to look down from the sky and witness cruelty and violence committed by man, who has been given the knowledge and freedom to act with compassion and kindness through the destruction of Jupiter and emancipation of Prometheus. Apollo is so shocked by Jupiter's fall that he stands and watches in wonder, causing the night to last into the day as the sun has forgotten to rise.

Ocean – Ocean is the god of the sea, the personification of the oceans, and the father of the sea nymphs Panthea, Ione, and Asia. Ocean, like all the natural elements, has been enslaved by Jupiter and is pleased to be set free when Prometheus is unchained and Jupiter falls from power. Ocean has a conversation with Apollo, the sun god, on the day of Jupiter's fall and expresses his pleasure that his waters will no longer be turned red with blood as a result of the cruelty and acts of violence performed by men. This reflects the return of harmony between mankind and nature, which has been restored as a result of Prometheus's defiance and Jupiter's fall.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Good Spirits – The Good Spirits are the counterparts of the Furies and are sent by the Earth to comfort Prometheus during his imprisonment after the Furies have tormented him.

The Phantasm of Jupiter – The shadow version of Jupiter who is called up by the Earth to repeat Prometheus's curse.

The Moon – The barren sister planet of the Earth who is brought back to life alongside the Earth after Prometheus's liberation.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

KNOWLEDGE AND FREEDOM

In the classical story of Prometheus, the Titan is punished by the ruler of the Greek Gods, Zeus, for giving humanity the gift of fire. By giving humans fire Prometheus gives mankind the ability to survive in the wilderness and to make use of the tools of his environment. Fire in the story thus symbolizes knowledge and civilization, while the fact that Prometheus is punished for his gift to mankind has traditionally suggested that providing humans with knowledge is an act of transgression. There are thus clear parallels between Prometheus's story and the Book of Genesis, in which Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, against God's wishes, and, as a result, bring sin into the world. In his version of *Prometheus Unbound*, however, Shelley draws on both classical and Christian imagery to challenge the idea that knowledge is sinful or transgressive. Instead, his *Prometheus Unbound* suggests that knowledge is something that *helps* humanity because it gives them the capacity to fully understand their own behavior and, in turn, allows them to freely make wise and moral choices.

Shelley's poem opens on the image of Prometheus chained to the mountain, suffering under the punishment administered by Jupiter (the Roman counterpart of Zeus). This image immediately establishes Prometheus's action of providing humans with knowledge as an affront to the Gods. In fact, the entire first act of *Prometheus Unbound* focuses on Prometheus's torture at the hands of Jupiter, who has ruled supreme over Heaven, the Earth, and mankind since Prometheus's capture. By focusing on Prometheus's punishment rather than his transgression, Shelley highlights Jupiter's cruelty. This helps Shelley to frame Jupiter as the villain of *Prometheus Unbound* and center the rebellious and defiant Prometheus as the hero. This, in turn, positions the gift of knowledge as something worth any cost.

Jupiter's cruelty is further highlighted in Act 2, when Asia, a sea nymph who is Prometheus's wife, explains that Prometheus originally gave knowledge to Jupiter on the condition that the

god "let man be free." Jupiter however, enslaved mankind, and as such Prometheus gave human beings knowledge so that they could tame the hostile environment that Jupiter had provided for them. At first, man used this knowledge for good, inventing language, science, and the arts, until Jupiter captured Prometheus and spread his own negative example—of greed, fear and power-lust—among mankind. Asia's description of Prometheus's transgression, and Jupiter's response to it, highlights the fact that what is considered by Jupiter to be a sin actually had a positive effect on humanity and that, although Prometheus is punished like a criminal, he has really acted in humanity's best interests by trying to provide them with knowledge.

However, because Jupiter has bound Prometheus (who symbolizes knowledge and free will) humanity has become misguided and used its knowledge for evil instead of good. By binding Prometheus, Jupiter has placed restrictions on knowledge: though humanity makes use of the tools that knowledge has allowed them to create, they cannot use them effectively for good because they lack the self-knowledge and the free-will to fully comprehend their own behavior. This is in keeping with the fact that, although Shelley was a radical thinker who felt that education was a gift, he was also wary of the effects of unchecked scientific exploration, which was an ever-growing concern in the nineteenth century. Shelley felt that empirical science, with no sense of morals or ethics to underpin it, could lead humanity to disaster. (This is also the theme of *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Shelley, Shelley's wife, which had the subtitle *The Modern Prometheus.)* Shelley's *Prometheus* suggests that, in the wrong hands, knowledge can be a destructive force as well as a tool of freedom.

Prometheus is the only being in the world whom Jupiter cannot conceal knowledge from, and therefore cannot subdue. Jupiter is thus afraid of Prometheus and the influence that the Titan's guidance would have on humanity, as this would allow humankind to think for themselves and question Jupiter's authority. Ironically, then, although Prometheus is bound, he is truly free from Jupiter's evil influence as he fully understands both the potential evil and the potential good of his actions. As a result, Prometheus is able to choose wisely, with good, rather than evil, in mind.

After Jupiter has fallen, Prometheus is freed by Hercules and a new age of wisdom and freedom is established on earth. Jupiter's fall signifies the liberation of knowledge among mankind. The Furies previous description of a confused world in which the wise have no love, and the loving have no wisdom, has been defeated and, instead, knowledge mixed with love and compassion is available to all. Celebrating his freedom, Prometheus states that man is also "now free," explicitly linking his own fate with the whole of humankind's.

Prometheus anticipates that this liberation of knowledge will lead to the discovery of "arts unimagined" and notes that "man grows wise and kind, and veil by veil, evil and error fall." This suggests that the result of Prometheus toppling Jupiter has been an increase in knowledge among human beings. Shelley therefore suggests that knowledge, when used with noble aims in mind, is a positive force for mankind and will advance the progress of civilization, potentially alleviating suffering in the world. According to Shelley, it is only by making knowledge fully available to all, and by allowing people the freedom to explore and question beliefs, that humanity can advance as a species—because only then will people have the tools available to choose the wisest course for the greatest good.

AUTHORITY AND RESISTANCE

Shelley's Prometheus symbolizes resistance against authoritarian forces, even if that resistance leads to punishment or isolation. Shelley himself was a non-conformist and a radical thinker who was disgusted by the rigid social conventions and class systems of the nineteenth century, which he felt kept the poor enslaved and placed restrictions on the human mind, body, and spirit. Shelley despised conventions such as marriage and institutions like the Christian Church and the Monarchy. He believed that individuals must be free to think, act, and make decisions for themselves and that social institutions placed obstacles in the way of this, disrupting the natural course of life and deliberately misguiding people in order to achieve their own corrupt aims. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Jupiter represents a culmination of these forces that Shelley viewed as oppressive, while the poet's depiction of Prometheus celebrates the unwavering spirit of the individual who refuses to bow to corrupt powers.

Shelley demonstrates his own personal resistance to archaic and corrupt sources of power through his use of imagery in *Prometheus Unbound*. For example, he uses Jupiter's reign to symbolize the powerful institutions that the poet felt prevented social reform—reform that, in his mind, was desperately needed to alleviate suffering among the populace. Jupiter is notably referred to as a "Monarch" and described as carrying a "sceptre of pale gold." This associates Jupiter with the worldly powers that Shelley opposed, such as the Church and the Monarchy; the "pale sceptre" is a symbol of kingly power and also an item carried by the Pope, who is head of the Catholic Church.

Jupiter also symbolizes the restrictive social conventions in Britain during the Enlightenment period. Shelley felt that repressive social customs, which discouraged emotional expression and, instead, encouraged social order and rationality, were slowing the advancement of society and indirectly supporting outdated establishments like the Church and Monarchy. This is reflected in the poem when the Furies visit Prometheus in Act 1 and tell him that under Jupiter's corrupt reign, men are ruled by "hypocrisy and custom" rather than honesty and virtue. Shelley uses the image of Prometheus

reining in Jupiter, "as one who checks a wild-eyed charioteer," to suggest that powerful institutions need to be reined in by resistance from individuals among the populace. This image is later repeated by the image of the Hours as "wild-eyed charioteers," as the Hours are the slaves of Jupiter who, in turn, make humanity slaves to the passage of time and mortality. By including such imagery in his poem, Shelley hoped to inspire a spirit of resistance and nonconformity among his readers.

By undermining the will of Jupiter and giving humanity fire, Prometheus has challenged the established authority and, as a result, is punished. Shelley frames this behavior as heroic and ultimately successful, despite the pain it causes Prometheus. Prometheus is heralded as a "champion" of humankind because he is willing to sacrifice his own comfort in order to stand up to power and challenge Jupiter's "supreme" reign. Romanticism as a movement valued individual resistance to authority and felt that it was more noble to be ostracized from society than to compromise one's morals or ideals in order to conform or be accepted. This individualism is further reflected in Prometheus's refusal to reach a compromise with Jupiter when this option is offered to him by the messenger Mercury. In his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley notes that he deviates from the classical subject matter, the Aeschylus text, on this point because in Aeschylus's version of the story, Jupiter (Zeus) and Prometheus reach a compromise and Prometheus accepts Jupiter's partial rule over the Earth. Shelley's Romantic hero, by contrast, is uncompromising and will not bow to Jupiter's oppressive authority regardless of the torment he faces as a result, inviting Jupiter instead to "pour forth the cup of pain." Prometheus's refusal to support Jupiter's reign, which he feels is detrimental to humanity, suggests that it is more heroic to actively support justice and morality for all than to make compromises with corrupt authority for the sake of comfort and personal gain.

Although Prometheus is tortured, he feels pity for Jupiter and refuses to repeat the curse that he had addressed to Jupiter when he was first chained to the mountain. This represents Shelley's belief in passive resistance as a tool for social change rather than violent acts of revolution. Similarly, Prometheus maintains that he is "king" over himself even as the Furies torture him. This reflects Shelley's belief in an individual's duty to control themselves, even if provoked, and not to give into the temptation of attacking their enemy in a way which compromises their own morals. Although Prometheus did initially curse Jupiter, he now pities him because he is evil and, therefore, can only feel negative emotions which "gape like a hell within." Prometheus, meanwhile, despite his torture, can feel "peace" in his own mind because he has stood by his principles and not abandoned a course which he believes to be moral. This demonstrates Shelley's belief in the individual as a force that can threaten powerful institutions.

Shelley uses the metaphor of resistance gathering "flake by flake" to form an avalanche to suggest that if enough individuals choose to resist corrupt sources of power, then eventually a collective change will be made. Indeed, the poet's imagery demonstrating the power of individual resistance has echoed throughout many of history's social justice movements, including the American Civil Rights Movement. By highlighting Prometheus's dignity, in his refusal to curse Jupiter, and his determination to resist Jupiter without sinking to Jupiter's level of cruelty, Shelley builds a case for passive resistance as a noble and heroic form of social action.

CHRISTIANITY AND FORGIVENESS

Despite his rejection of conventional religion, Shelley fuses the classical story of Prometheus with Christian allegory, referring particularly to the teachings of Christ and his message that love and forgiveness—rather than worldly powers—are the true strengths of humanity. Although Shelley felt that Christ's teachings had been distorted by the Church, he does reference Jesus and use Christian imagery to support his central thesis in *Prometheus Unbound*: that love is stronger than—and will ultimately triumph over—hate.

The Furies, monsters from the world of the dead who are sent to torture Prometheus, mock his dedication to the freedom of mankind by informing him that "one" man (Jesus) has already attempted to teach humanity about love and forgiveness but that people have rejected this message. Clearing referencing Jesus, the Furies tell Prometheus that "one came forth of gentle worth, smiling on the sanguine earth." Although Jesus's "words outlived him," his message has not been used for good but has been corrupted by men "like swift poison, withering up truth, peace and pity." This refers to the way in which the Christian Church has deviated from Jesus's teachings and, instead, uses Jesus's name to gain power for themselves. The Furies view humanity's treatment of Jesus and rejection of his message as proof that humanity is damned and that Prometheus's endeavor to resist Jupiter is in vain because, even if Jupiter were to fall from power, humanity is too corrupt to be saved.

The Furies taunt Prometheus about this to try and break his spirit. Although Prometheus still refuses to bow to Jupiter, he is saddened by the story of Jesus and weeps for Jesus's "mild and gentle ghost," who wails "for the faith he kindled." This suggests that Shelley was sympathetic towards the teachings of Jesus and felt that, based on his characterization in the New Testament, Jesus would dislike the actions of the Church which are carried out in his name. Jesus is presented as a tragic figure in the poem and Christianity as a philosophy that has strayed very far from its central message of forgiveness and compassion.

Despite Shelley's rejection of orthodox religion, there are many similarities between Christ and Shelley's hero Prometheus. Prometheus is described as the "saviour" of mankind, just as

Jesus is referred to as man's saviour in the Bible. Prometheus, like Christ, undergoes a sacrificial torture because he has tried to help humanity. Prometheus is also described as the "sun" of mankind, suggesting that he will triumph over darkness. It is common in Christianity for Jesus to be associated with sunrise as a force which chases out darkness, which is associated with evil. It is also predicted that Prometheus will "quell the horseman grim, woundless though in heart or in limb." This prophecy suggests that Prometheus will kill death (the horseman) and this will end humanity's servitude to time and mortality. This is reminiscent of Christ's triumph over death through his own sacrificial death in the New Testament. Finally, Prometheus, like Christ, overcomes his enemies through forgiveness and love. The Hours and Jupiter are overthrown by the Spirit of Love, which everything in Shelley's poem is "subject to." While Prometheus's curse has frightened Jupiter, it is Prometheus's pity and forgiveness towards Jupiter which breaks the curse and ends Jupiter's reign, just as it is Christ's love which triumphs over death in the New Testament.

Christ's passive strength in the face of immense suffering is emulated by Shelley in the figure of Prometheus and is a crucial aspect of Prometheus's heroism, highlighting Shelley's belief that it is more valiant to vanquish one's enemies with compassion and forgiveness than with hatred and revenge. This message is further echoed when Panthea, a sea nymph and Asia's sister, and Asia follow their dream down to the lair of the Demogorgon and, swooning, are urged to "resist not the weakness" for "such strength there is in meekness." This echoes Christ's teaching that the meek will inherit the earth for they have true, emotional and spiritual power as opposed to worldly power.

Although Prometheus had cursed Jupiter when he was first chained to the mountain, during the course of his torment Prometheus has forgotten his curse. While the elements of the world "meditate" on Prometheus's threats to Jupiter "as a treasured spell" which implies their eventual liberation, it is actually Prometheus's refusal to renew his curse which strips Jupiter of his power. After Prometheus has stated that he no longer curses, but instead pities Jupiter, Panthea and Asia share a dream which confirms the prophecy that Prometheus will triumph over Jupiter and unleashes the Demogorgon—"the doom" which sits "coiled" under Jupiter's throne—and which topples Jupiter from power. Shelley's emphasis on forgiveness *as* heroism has parallels in the portrayal of Christ as the savior of mankind. However, Shelley's replacement of Christ with Prometheus suggests that, while he supports the message of forgiveness which Christianity contains, he feels that this message has become too corrupt to be salvaged and therefore, a new, radical form of moral belief must take its place.

NATURE, IMAGINATION, AND THE SUBLIME

Shelley viewed nature as a source of poetic and spiritual inspiration, a fact reflected in his extensive use of nature imagery in *Prometheus Unbound*. The Romantics felt that there was a natural sympathy between emotions, imagination, and the natural world and that natural images were the most intuitive metaphors for describing emotional and psychological states. In his Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley notes that he has composed his poem "upon the mountain ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades, and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees." The inspiration for the poem comes from the arrival of spring in this beautiful landscape and this corresponds with the poem's themes of "new life" and hope for mankind. Shelley continues such imagery throughout the poem, ultimately suggesting the dependence of humanity on nature and the importance of seeking reverence for rather than dominance over the natural world.

Shelley uses nature imagery and metaphors to convey imaginative sensation to the reader throughout *Prometheus Unbound*. In Act 1, when Prometheus hears the dead speaking but cannot understand their words, he describes the whispering sound as "tingling" through his frame the way lightening "tingles, hovering ere it strikes." This suggests that Prometheus is on the brink of understanding the prophecy about himself but that he has not quite been struck by its true meaning. This conveys a recognisable feeling to the reader—when one can almost understand something, but full understanding is just out of reach—through a phenomenon from nature. Humans are also depicted as deeply connected with nature in *Prometheus Unbound*. Describing the birth of Prometheus—as one of the Titans from classical mythology, the Earth is Prometheus's mother—the Earth says that "joy ran, as blood within a living frame" when Prometheus, the only hope for humanity, was born. This connects the human body to the planet itself and suggests a correspondence between the physical and emotional health of people and the health of nature and the Earth. The Earth is also enslaved by Jupiter, alongside humanity, describing herself as "linked to some wheel of pain" by the tyrant, which refers to the Earth's fixed route round the sun. This furthers the metaphor of a connection between humans and their environment.

Although nature is framed as a force which corresponds with and should exist in harmony with humanity in *Prometheus Unbound*, Jupiter's tyranny over the Earth has broken this bond between humans and nature and, as a result of this, humanity either struggles with its environment or seeks to destroy, consume, or control it. While Prometheus is chained (representing for Shelley the current state of humanity when he is writing) humanity is out of sync with nature and, therefore, nature presents a threat to humanity as well as a

source of inspiration and joy. Since Prometheus has been chained and Jupiter has ruled the Earth, plague and famine have ravaged humanity and plants, which should nourish humans, have been mixed with "poisonous weeds."

The potential for both beauty *and* destruction in nature (while Prometheus is chained) is encapsulated in the Romantic idea of the Sublime, in which nature is both an awe-inspiring and an incomprehensible force. A common Romantic metaphor for this is the image of shipwrecks which Shelly uses several times throughout *Prometheus Unbound*, as the image of a shipwreck symbolizes man's helplessness in the face of a natural force like the sea. Shelley's descriptions of "cities sinking in howling ruin" also suggest his hostility towards industrialization and urban expansion. Throughout the nineteenth century, rural agriculture declined consistently while the industrial revolution drove people to the cities where poverty and overcrowding led to disease and terrible living conditions in slums, as well as a diminishing of the surrounding countryside. Shelley's poem suggests that humans must accept that they will never be able to fully comprehend or control nature and that their arrogance in trying, through technological advancement and industrialization, is a threat to the natural world and to their own existence within it.

Hope to bridge the gap between man and nature comes in the form of poetry, love, and the imagination in *Prometheus Unbound*. This union is finally achieved when Prometheus is unbound and the Spirit of the Earth runs free again, filling people with wonder at the beauty of the natural world. When Prometheus is visited by the good spirits, one tells him that she has travelled to him from a poet's lips while he was composing an imaginative work and was immersed in nature. This suggests that the composition of poetry is a virtuous act that advances human society, especially when it is inspired by and draws the reader's attention to the natural world. Prometheus's release from the mountain and the fall of Jupiter represent the return of man's communion with nature and suggests that, from that moment on, humanity will be able to flourish in nature and will no longer struggle with famine, disease, or death, which Prometheus has banished.

The personification of the sun (Apollo) and the Ocean notably rejoice in this renewed harmony between man and nature, delighted that there will be "no more" "blood and groans." This implies that humanity and nature are profoundly linked and that, when humans mistreat each other, they also mistreat the natural world with which they are joined. This parallels the Christian idea that hurting one person means hurting all humanity, but Shelley extends this idea to the natural world as well. Through his personification of nature in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley demonstrates that respect for nature and a better understanding of the natural world, rather than an over-reliance on industrial technology, will renew humanity's bond with its environment and remind people that, to an extent, nature and humanity rely on each other to survive.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FIRE

Fire symbolizes knowledge in *Prometheus Unbound*. In the story, Prometheus "tamed fire" for humanity after Jupiter misused his power as a ruler and failed to share the knowledge, which he had been given by Prometheus, with humanity. Without this knowledge that was their "birthright," humanity had no power of thought or reason and therefore no ability to understand their emotions or to feel love. Rather than providing humanity with fully formed knowledge, however, Prometheus instead gave humankind fire, granting people the freedom to develop tools and advance civilization as they wished. The power and freedom contained within the gift of fire reflects humanity's instinct to explore, think, experiment, and discover things for themselves.

Prometheus, who is a "champion" of freedom and knowledge, gave this gift freely, while the tyrannical Jupiter fears, denies and represses it. Jupiter's fear of fire—really, his fear of knowledge and the independent thinking such knowledge inevitably entails—springs from the possibility that his role as supreme authority will be compromised if humanity learns to question the way he rules them. Knowledge in this sense is, like fire, a powerful and unpredictable force that cannot necessarily be contained once it is set free. The Furies imply as much when they suggest that Prometheus's gift of knowledge to mankind has "kindled" a desire for power that "outran" him. Although the Furies mean this in a negative sense, Prometheus insists that the benefits of knowledge outweigh its destructive tendencies when it is allowed to flourish unrepressed. The ending of Shelley's poem, in which the Earth is transformed into a planet suffused with love, suggests that true freedom requires full, unbridled knowledge, as only with such knowledge can humans make decisions based in love.

THE HOURS

The Hours represent the passage of time as humans experience it. They are the servants of Jupiter, who uses the Hours to enslave mankind; this personification of time suggests that humans are slaves to the processes of aging and mortality, which is a major cause of suffering in the world. The Hours ride around the world in chariots, some of them racing forwards "as though pursued" and others enjoying the speed at which they travel. This represents human's inability to live in the present. The Hours,

then, symbolize both the experience of wishing time would go faster and the sense of enjoying oneself so much that time seems to pass by too quickly. In either case, humanity cannot control time even as people use it to structure their lives.

The Hours also represent Shelley's dislike of the industrial work day, which, as factory jobs became more prevalent in urban centers, parceled the day up into working hours and dictated where people must be and what they must be doing at various times. Shelley felt that this was a type of modern tyranny being enacted upon the human spirit and that it went against the natural inclination of mankind, which was to follow the rhythms of nature. Shelley felt that the industrial work day—and the installation of public clocks in cities, which led to an increased awareness of time as a unit of productivity—increased the rift between humans and their natural environment and made city workers the slaves of the greedy and the powerful, who controlled every aspect of their lives.

THE SPIRIT OF LOVE

The Spirit of Love represents the most powerful force in the universe, to which all beings are "subject." The personification of Love as the highest being in the universe supports Shelley's message in *Prometheus Unbound* that love and compassion are more powerful than violence and aggression. Shelley depicts the Spirit of Love as an attractive youth who rides a chariot around the circuit run by the Hours, the spirits of time whom Jupiter has unleashed on the world and who have made slaves of humankind. The Spirit of Love is depicted as moving around the edge of this circle run by the Hours, suggesting that Love is not bound or constrained by time in the way that humanity is under Jupiter's reign.

The Spirit of Love's chariot is an "ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire." The "ivory shell" connects the Spirit of Love to the shell blown by Spirits of the Hour, which spreads love all around the world when it is sounded. This shell also originally belonged to Asia, Prometheus's wife: when Asia is described as riding on the sea in a shell, this evokes images of the birth of Venus, the classical goddess of love, and thus connects Asia with love. Asia and Prometheus's coupling, then, represents the union of love and knowledge. This is further reflected by the fact that Love's chariot is notably "inlaid with crimson fire" because Love and knowledge are inseparable in *Prometheus Unbound*. Humanity must have access to both in order to act in a way that allows hope to flourish in the world.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W.W. Norton edition of *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* published in 2002.

Preface Quotes

I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language, and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary.

Related Characters: Prometheus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

In his Preface, Shelley sets out to justify some of the creative decisions he made while writing *Prometheus Unbound*. Shelley draws attention to the fact that he has adapted his story from a classical play of the same name, by the Greek writer Aeschylus, and seeks to justify the ways in which he has deviated from the original source material. Shelley is using his poem to make a statement of resistance against the establishments of the Enlightenment period, which he felt had become corrupt. Shelley draws attention to the fact that he deviates from Aeschylus's original subject matter, in which Prometheus and Jupiter reach a compromise, in order to strengthen the emotional resonance and the key message of his "fable." It is important that Shelley refers to his poem as a "fable," as a fable is a type of classical story underpinned by a specific moral that the reader is expected to understand and emulate in everyday life.

Shelley feels that his message about resisting corrupt forms of power, at the risk of personal injury and imprisonment, would be undermined if Prometheus settled his dispute amicably with Jupiter. Therefore, Shelley highlights this change to further cement the message of *Prometheus Unbound* in the reader's mind and to remind them that the themes and messages of poetry are meant to be treated seriously, as things to be emulated in the real world, and not simply as a form of light entertainment.

> The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan because, in addition to courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandizement, which in the Hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest. The character of Satan engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. In the minds of those who consider that magnificent fiction with a religious feeling, it engenders something worse. But Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends.

Related Characters: Prometheus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage of the Preface, Shelley draws attention to the fact that he has partially modeled the character of Prometheus on the character of Satan as he appears in John Milton's 1667 epic poem, *Paradise Lost*. Shelley was a Romantic poet, and the Romantics were particularly influenced by Milton's personification of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, which describes Satan's fall from heaven and then his part in the Fall of Man in the biblical Book of Genesis. William Blake, one of the forerunners of the Romantic movement, portrayed Satan as a spirit of freedom and knowledge who was punished for challenging a corrupt and power-hungry God. Blake's portrayal of Satan in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was based on *Paradise Lost* and became an important influence on Romantic poetry. Shelley was also influenced by Milton in his combination of classical epic conventions with Christian allegory.

As Shelley wants his readers to emulate Prometheus's behavior, he does not wish to create a hero who is a bad influence. Instead, Shelley uses a figure who is similar to Satan (Prometheus, who transgresses against the gods by giving humans knowledge) but endows him with Christian virtues (such as kindness and compassion) so that his readers will emulate Satan's quest for freedom of knowledge, and Christ's message of love and forgiveness, but not Satan's negative qualities like "ambition" and "desire for vengeance."

> We owe the great writers of the golden age of our literature to that fervid awakening of the public mind which shook to dust the oldest and most oppressive form of the Christian Religion. We owe Milton to the progress and development of the same spirit; the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a Republican and a bold enquirer into morals and religion. The great writers of our own age are, we have reason to suppose, the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change in our social condition or the opinions which cement it. The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning, and the equilibrium between institutions and opinions is now restoring, or is about to be restored.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

In his Preface, Shelley lays out his belief that great literature is both the result of and an agent in producing social change. He gives several examples of this and relates these to the nineteenth century, the time in which Shelley was writing. The "golden age" that Shelley refers to is the Renaissance, which took place between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries in Europe. The Renaissance was a period of scientific exploration and artistic advancement that propelled Europe out of the medieval or the "Dark Ages," a period marked by cultural stagnation due to the powerful role of the Church in society and the lack of scientific advancement. The Renaissance, according to Shelley, represented a period in which people began to question the authority of the Church.

Shelley feels that John Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost*, was a bold, enquiring mind, who questioned the status quo and, through literature, inspired others to do so as well. Shelley had an interest in "Republican" ideas, as opposed to rule by Monarchy, because of his interest in the French Revolution, in which the Monarchy were deposed, and a Republic established. Shelley believes another social change like this is imminent. He uses a metaphor to express this belief ("the cloud of mind discharging it's collective lightening") and to suggest that antiquated establishments like the Church, which still retained power in Europe, would soon become outdated as public opinion changed.

Act 1 Quotes

> Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits
> But One, who throng those bright and rolling Worlds.
> Which Thou and I alone of living things
> Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth
> Made multitudinous with thy slaves [...]
> [...]
> Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours
> And moments—aye divided thy keen pangs
> Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,
> Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire:—
> More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
> From thine unenvied throne [...]

Related Characters: Prometheus (speaker), Jupiter

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.1-5, 12-17

Explanation and Analysis

For the past three thousand years, Prometheus has been tortured and chained to the mountainside, by the tyrant god Jupiter, as punishment for giving humanity the gift of fire. In this passage, Dawn is breaking on the mountainside, and Prometheus addresses Jupiter from his chains. Prometheus addresses Jupiter as the "Monarch of Gods and Daemons and all Spirits but One." This implies that Jupiter is the ruler of everything in the universe. The only thing he does not have control over is Prometheus's mind and his decision to oppose Jupiter. This is ironic because Prometheus is physically restrained by Jupiter and, yet, because of his refusal to bow to Jupiter, he is not fully in Jupiter's power and thus is not Jupiter's slave. Prometheus's mind is his "empire," which he has control over. Although Prometheus is tortured on the mountainside, he feels that his "empire" is "more glorious" than Jupiter's reign over the whole world. This suggests that Prometheus does not envy Jupiter for his power and feels that Jupiter is not entitled to rule over so much.

Prometheus also implies in this passage that he is only being in the world who has escaped becoming Jupiter's "slave." Prometheus, therefore, functions as Jupiter's opposite, or character foil, throughout the poem. While Jupiter is a symbol of tyranny and power, Prometheus is a symbol of freedom because he does not want power over others and refuses to bow to corrupt authority.

> And yet to me welcome is Day and Night,
> Whether one breaks the hoar frost of the morn,
> Or starry, dim, and slow, the other climbs
> The leaden-coloured East; for then they lead
> Their wingless, crawling Hours, one among whom
> —As some dark Priest hales the reluctant victim—
> Shall drag thee, cruel King, to kiss the blood
> From these pale feet, which then might trample thee
> If they disdained not such a prostrate slave.—
> Disdain? Ah no! I pity thee.—What Ruin
> Will hunt thee undefended through the wide Heaven!
> How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,
> Gape like a Hell within! I speak in grief
> Not exultation, for I hate no more
> As then, ere misery made me wise.—The Curse
> Once breathed on thee I would recall. [...]

Related Characters: Prometheus (speaker), Jupiter

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.44-59

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Prometheus, still chained to the mountainside, continues his defiant speech directed at Jupiter. He tells Jupiter that the difference between Day and Night is meaningless to him because his whole life revolves around defying Jupiter, who is his torturer. Prometheus announces that he enjoys observing the passage of time because time brings him ever closer to Jupiter's inevitable demise, which he feels certain will take place even though he has no evidence for this. Time is personified in Shelley's poem: moments and hours are represented as spirits that Jupiter employs to bind humanity in the constraints of time and the constraints of their own mortality. Shelley disliked the tendency to divide the work day into hours, which was becoming more common in nineteenth-century society as industrial manufacturing jobs became more available. Shelley felt that this was a social tyranny that enslaved the individual and disrupted the natural rhythms of human life, which he felt should be based on nature and the individual's natural inclination.

Prometheus believes that one of these "Hours," or spirits, will bring the moment of Jupiter's defeat. Although this will bring about the defeat of his enemy, Prometheus genuinely pities Jupiter. This suggests that Jupiter's crimes are terrible and, therefore, will bring on a terrible retribution. It also supports Prometheus's claim that "misery has made

him wise" because he has learned compassion for Jupiter and feels that evil behavior cannot bring happiness and "gapes like a hell within."

> [...] Ye Mountains,
> Whose many-voiced Echoes, through the mist
> Of cataracts, flung the thunder of that spell!
> Ye icy Springs, stagnant with wrinkling frost,
> Which vibrated to hear me, and then crept
> Shuddering through India! Thou serenest Air,
> Through which the Sun walks burning without beams!
> And ye swift Whirlwinds, who on poised wings
> Hung mute and moveless o'er yon hushed abyss,
> As thunder louder than your own made rock
> The orbed world! If then my words had power
> —Though I am changed so that aught evil wish
> Is dead within, although no memory be
> Of what is hate—let them not lose it now!
> What was that curse? for ye all heard me speak.

Related Characters: Prometheus (speaker), Jupiter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.59-73

Explanation and Analysis

During his time chained to the mountain, as punishment for giving humanity the gift of fire against the wishes of the tyrant god, Jupiter, Prometheus has forgotten the curse he spoke against Jupiter when he was first imprisoned. He implores the elements to remind him of this curse.

Nature is personified in *Prometheus Unbound* and the elements Prometheus speaks to (the mountains, rivers, winds, and whirlwinds) have personalities and living spirits. Like Prometheus himself, they are timeless, immortal forces. Prometheus is a Titan, a group of semi-deities and the children of the Earth, or the goddess Gaia, in classical mythology. Prometheus is portrayed as more powerful than the natural elements, as they are enslaved by Jupiter and too afraid to challenge him. Prometheus notes that the elements "hung mute" when they heard his curse. This passage reflects Shelley's interests both in pantheism, or the idea that God manifests himself in nature (in other words, that all parts of the universe are made up of God), and in classical mythology in which nature was commonly personified.

Prometheus does not wish to renew his curse against Jupiter because he has learned compassion during his suffering and "aught evil wish is dead within" him. However, neither does he wish to bow to Jupiter and, although he does not wish to repeat his words, he acknowledges that they still contain a message of powerful defiance against Jupiter, which Prometheus wishes to maintain. This reflects Shelley's belief in non-violent resistant as an effective method for achieving social change.

> When thou didst from her bosom, like a cloud
> Of glory, arise, a spirit of keen joy!
> And at thy voice her pining sons uplifted
> Their prostrate brows from the polluting dust
> And our almighty Tyrant with fierce dread
> Grew pale—until his thunder chained thee here.—
> Then—see those million worlds which burn and roll
> Around us: their inhabitants beheld
> My sphered light wane in wide Heaven; the sea
> Was lifted by strange tempest, and new fire
> From earthquake-rifted mountains of bright snow
> Shook its portentous hair beneath Heaven's frown;
> Lightning and Inundation vexed the plains;
> Blue thistles bloomed in cities; foodless toads
> Within voluptuous chambers panting crawled;
> When Plague had fallen on man and beast and worm,
> And Famine,—and black blight on herb and tree,
> And in the corn and vines and meadow-grass
> Teemed ineradicable poisonous weeds
> Draining their growth, for my wan breast was dry
> With grief,—and the thin air, my breath, was stained
> With the contagion of a mother's hate
> Breathed on her child's destroyer [...]

Related Characters: The Earth (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.157-179

Explanation and Analysis

The Earth, who is Prometheus's mother, describes his birth, which brought her "keen joy," followed by her despair when Jupiter chained him to the mountain. The Earth's despair causes tangible effects that change the nature of the planet, and are part of the curse of Jupiter's reign and Prometheus's imprisonment. The Earth suggests that Prometheus's birth brought her joy because it inspired "fierce dread" in Jupiter. This supports the idea that

Prometheus symbolizes and embodies freedom and knowledge, which creates a positive environment for humanity on Earth, while Jupiter embodies tyranny, violence, and corruption, which creates a negative environment on Earth. The fact that Jupiter is afraid of Prometheus suggests the Prometheus's power is stronger than Jupiter's, and that Jupiter knows this. His only recourse to protect his reign from Prometheus's power is to keep him imprisoned.

Jupiter's imprisonment of Prometheus negatively impacts the world, consequently emphasizing how Prometheus's birth positively impacted the world. The Earth tells Prometheus that, since his capture, the planet has become an inhospitable to humans, who are ravaged by "plague" and "famine"—direct results of the Earth's grief over Jupiter's actions. This suggests that the link between humanity and nature has been severed as a result of tyranny, ignorance, and power-lust, and reflects Shelley's belief that humanity and nature were closely linked and that what was bad for humanity was also bad for the planet.

> Aye, do thy worst. Thou art Omnipotent.
> O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power,
> And my own will. Be thy swift mischiefs sent
> To blast mankind, from yon etherial tower.
> Let thy malignant spirit move
> In darkness over those I love:
> On me and mine I imprecate
> The utmost torture of thy hate
> And thus devote to sleepless agony
> This undeclining head while thou must reign on high.
> [...]
>
> I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse
> Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse,
> Till thine Infinity shall be
> A robe of envenomed agony;
> And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain
> To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain.

Related Characters: The Phantasm of Jupiter (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter, The Earth

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.272-281, 286-291

Explanation and Analysis

The Earth summons the Phantasm of Jupiter from the shadow world to repeat the curse that Prometheus has forgotten during his time chained to the mountain. In his curse, Prometheus willingly sacrifices himself to Jupiter's torments in the hope that humanity will one day be free. He is willing to suffer endless torture and even invites Jupiter's "malignant spirit [to] move" over those he loves so that some resistance to Jupiter's omnipotent reign exists within the world. This connects Prometheus to the figure of Christ, who dies as a sacrifice so that humanity may be freed from their sins and gain eternal life after death. Unlike Christ, however, Prometheus has spoken violent words against Jupiter in his curse, hoping that Jupiter's power becomes a "crown of pain" and burns his like melting gold, clinging to his "dissolving brain."

In his curse, Prometheus states that he hopes that Jupiter's evil actions will come back to haunt him, and that his power, which currently has negative consequences for everything on the planet, will eventually have terrible consequences for Jupiter himself. The reference to the "crown of burning gold" aligns Jupiter with worldly powers, such as kings, from Shelley's own society. Shelley hated the Monarchy and felt that powerful establishments of this sort should be dismantled.

> Awful Sufferer! To thee unwilling, most unwillingly
> I come, by the great Father's will driven down
> To execute a doom of new revenge.
> Alas! I pity thee, and hate myself
> That I can do no more.—Aye from thy sight
> Returning, for a season. Heaven seems Hell,
> So thy worn form pursues me night and day,
> Smiling reproach. Wise art thou, firm and good,
> But vainly wouldst stand forth alone in strife
> Against the Omnipotent [...]

Related Characters: Mercury (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.353-362

Explanation and Analysis

Jupiter, who is omnipotent, hears Prometheus say that he does not wish to repeat his curse and takes this as a sign that Prometheus is vulnerable and that his position of defiance is weakening. He sends his messenger, Mercury (a messenger god in classical mythology, associated with compromise, negotiation, and trade), to try and tempt

Prometheus to compromise with Jupiter. Mercury admits that he runs Jupiter's errands "unwillingly." He implies that he does not agree with Jupiter's reign, even though he works for him, and calls Prometheus an "awful sufferer," which suggests that he hates to see Prometheus in pain. This suggests that Mercury wishes that freedom and knowledge were present in the world but is too cowardly to take a stand against Jupiter the way that Prometheus does.

Mercury admits that he is haunted by the image of Prometheus's suffering and that "Heaven seems Hell" to him. This suggests that compromising one's morals for personal gain will make that personal gain seem worthless. Mercury's experience suggests that it is impossible to truly enjoy the rewards he has received at the expense of his morals. Mercury is reluctant to take a stand against Jupiter because he believes that it is pointless and will do no good. This is why he believes that Prometheus's is suffering "vainly," or in vain. However, Shelley suggests that it is more noble to stand for a moral cause, even if it seems hopeless, than to give in to corrupt forms of power.

> Dost thou boast the clear knowledge thou waken'dst for man?
> Then was kindled within him a thirst which outran
> Those perishing waters: a thirst of fierce fever,
> Hope, love, doubt, desire—which consume him forever.
> One came forth, of gentle worth,
> Smiling on the sanguine earth;
> His words outlived him, like swift poison
> Withering up truth, peace and pity.

Related Characters: The Furies (speaker), Prometheus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.542-549

Explanation and Analysis

After Prometheus declines Mercury's offer of a compromise, Jupiter sends the Furies, monsters from the world of the dead, to torture Prometheus. They show him images of suffering on earth, which they claim are the result of the knowledge he gave to humanity. The Furies suggests that Prometheus should not "boast" of giving humanity knowledge, as the knowledge he "kindled" has become a destructive force that "consumes them." This supports the symbolic link between knowledge and fire in the poem, as fire is something that can be both useful and destructive. This passage reflects Shelley's anxieties over the pursuit of empirical knowledge in the Enlightenment period, which Shelley felt "outran" its bounds and potentially threatened, rather than helped, humanity.

The Furies send Prometheus a vision of "one man of gentle worth," a reference to the figure of Christ. Shelley, who was an atheist, suggests that Jesus was a real figure but implies that he is not spiritually powerful compared to Prometheus. The Furies imply that humanity is beyond saving because they have distorted Christ's message. Instead of spreading compassion and love, Christ's message "withers up truth, peace, and pity." Shelley was critical of the Church, but he was sympathetic towards the teachings of Jesus and felt that Jesus's positive message of love and compassion had been corrupted and "poisoned" by the corruption of organized religion.

> [...] Nature's sacred watchwords—they
> Were borne aloft in bright emblazonry.
> The nations thronged around, and cried aloud
> As with one voice, "Truth, liberty and love!"
> Suddenly fierce confusion fell from Heaven
> Among them—there was strife, deceit and fear;
> Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.
> This was the shadow of the truth I saw.

Related Characters: Prometheus (speaker), Panthea, Ione

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.648-655

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Prometheus tells Ione and Panthea about one of the visions that he witnessed while he was being tortured by the Furies. "Nature's watchwords" refers to the slogan, "Truth, liberty, and love." This suggests that this combination, of knowledge, freedom, and love, represents the ideal conditions for humanity to exist under. These "watchwords" also have a positive effect on nature, as the wellbeing of humanity is intimately connected with the wellbeing of the planet. This reflects Shelley's interest in pantheism and his belief that nature is a spiritual, living thing and an extension of human experience.

The image of "nations thronging" behind these words refers to the French Revolution, which took place between 1788 and 1799. During the French Revolution, rebels deposed

and executed the French Monarchy in an attempt to gain liberty for the French people, who were starving under the Monarchy's callous reign. The French Revolution's message of liberty, equality, and alleviation of poverty greatly influenced the Romantics. However, these aims were ultimately unfulfilled, and revolution ended in terror. Shelley connects these images of "fierce confusion" and "strife, deceit, and fear" to the central idea in his poem: that, without knowledge, freedom, and love, all attempts at revolution will end poorly and become tyrannical regimes. In the context of the poem, this reflects the negative influence of Jupiter's reign, under which humanity cannot reach its full potential.

> Though Ruin now Love's shadow be,
> Following him destroyingly
> On Death's white and winged steed,
> Which the fleetest cannot flee—
> Trampling down both flower and weed,
> Man and beast and foul and fair,
> Like a tempest through the air;
> Thou shalt quell this Horseman grim,
> Woundless though in heart or limb.—

Related Characters: Good Spirits (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter, The Earth, The Furies

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.780-788

Explanation and Analysis

After the Furies, Jupiter's servants and monsters from the world of the dead, have tortured Prometheus, the Earth calls up good spirits to comfort her son. These good spirits tell Prometheus of a prophecy that foretells hope and new life for the world, and that revolves around him. The Spirits tell Prometheus that, under Jupiter's reign, love has been displaced by ruin as the most powerful force in the world. This is because of the restrictions placed on knowledge and freedom under Jupiter's reign. Ruin and death are connected because ruin rides death's "winged steed." Ruin and death are described as inescapable, as everything on earth is doomed to die.

The spirits' prophecy of hope informs Prometheus that he will "quell this horseman grim," personifying death in the figure of a horseman. This is a common image because of a verse from the Book of Revelation, which describes death as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse who rides a pale horse. Although it seems that death is "woundless" and cannot be defeated, the spirits foretell that Prometheus will overcome him. This links Prometheus to the figure of Christ; Christ's death on the cross symbolizes a triumph over death because humanity gains the potential to enter heaven through Christ's sacrifice. Similarly, while currently "ruin" is "love's shadow," the prophecy will defeat this order and Prometheus will defeat ruin with an act of love.

Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

> If such live thus, have others other lives
> Under pink blossoms or within the bells
> Of meadow flowers, or folded violets deep,
> Or on their dying odors, when they die,
> Or in the sunlight of the sphered dew?
>
> Aye, many more, which we may well divine.
> But should we stay to speak, noontide would come,
> And thwart Silenus find his goats undrawn
> And grudge to sing those wise and lovely songs
> Of fate and chance and God, and Chaos old.
> And love, and the chained Titan's woeful doom
> And how he shall be loosed, and make the Earth
> One brotherhood—delightful strains which cheer
> Our solitary twilights, and which charm
> To silence the unenvying nightingales.

Related Characters: Prometheus, Asia, Panthea

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.2.83-97

Explanation and Analysis

Panthea and Asia both receive prophetic dreams about Prometheus's release. Their dreams lead them towards the abyss and the realm of the Demogorgon, where they will learn a secret about the fate of the world. On the way, they pass a beautiful, enchanted glade and overhear two Fauns talking. The Fauns are discussing the idea that plants, flowers, and other elements of the natural world might contain living spirits. They suggest that there might be innumerable lives in the plant material all around them, like "under pink blossoms or within the bells of meadow flowers." This comment reflects Shelley's interest in pantheism, which is the belief in nature as a living, sentient being that is imbued with God or divinity. The Romantics. Shelley included, felt that humanity had become disconnected from the natural world and had forgotten how

to understand the natural world as a spiritual and vital part of their environment.

Pantheism is also common in pagan, classical culture, and this fueled the Romantic belief that older cultures were wiser than modern, industrial society, which often damaged nature through technological production. The description of sprites or spirits living in flowers is also reminiscent of the fairy lore that abounds in Shakespeare's poetry, as the poet was hugely influential on Shelley. This image of fauns and shepherds is also common in pastoral poetry: a classical style that represents idyllic scenes of rural life. The Fauns' wisdom is also demonstrated in their claim to know the prophecy about Prometheus and how "he shall be loosed, and make the Earth one brotherhood."

Act 2, Scene 3 Quotes

[...] Hark! the rushing snow!
The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,
Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there
Flake after flake, in Heaven-defying minds
As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth
Is loosened, and the nations echo round
Shaken to their roots: as do the mountains now.

Related Characters: Asia (speaker), Jupiter, Panthea

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.3.36-42

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Panthea and Asia reach the entrance to the lair of the Demogorgon. The entrance to the lair is in the mountains and the snow on the mountains reminds Asia of resistance gathering against Jupiter on Earth. In his Preface, Shelley states that he uses imagery from nature to reflect the internal working of the human mind. In this scene, Asia equates a view of the sun on snow capped mountains with the current state of humanity. The idea that the avalanche is "sun awakened" operates on two levels. First, avalanches are literally caused by the sun melting and loosening snow in the mountains. Second, the "sun awakened" avalanche represents knowledge, which illuminates the experience of humanity and inspires them to form an avalanche of resistance to Jupiter's tyranny. This relates to the comparison of Prometheus with the sun and the association between fire and knowledge, as fire is also a source of light and heat.

The image of the avalanche also suggests individuals within humanity acting together to form a mighty force. Although an avalanche is a large body of snow, this body of snow is made up of individual flakes. Shelley reveres both the collective force of the avalanche and the power of the individual flakes that make up a part of this mass. The phrase "heaven-defying minds" suggests both humanity's resistance to Jupiter in heaven and Shelley's personal dislike of the Church, which he viewed as a hindrance to knowledge.

Resist not the weakness—
Such strength is in meekness—
That the Eternal, the Immortal,
Must unloose through life's portal
The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne
By that alone!

Related Characters: Jupiter, Asia, Panthea, Demogorgon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.3.93-98

Explanation and Analysis

As Panthea and Asia get closer to the Demogorgon's lair, they are drawn down into a swoon that will take them through the final step of the journey. A chorus of voices urges them not to resist because their actions are necessary to fulfill the prophecy that will unseat Jupiter from power.

Panthea and Asia must give into "weakness" to fulfill the prophecy. This reflects Shelley's message that real strength exists in acts of love, sacrifice, and passive resistance, rather than through acts of aggression, power seeking, or violence. The idea that there is "strength in meekness" also mirrors Christ's message that the meek will inherit the earth as it is them who have true power, rather than power gained through violence or domination. This reflects Shelley's support of Christ's message despite Shelley's profound dislike of organized religion or the Church.

It is only through this act of voluntary weakness that Panthea and Asia will be able to "unloose" the "snake-like Doom" that sits "coiled underneath" Jupiter's throne, and bring about the end of Jupiter's tyrannical reign. The image of the Demogorgon as "snake-like" suggests that Jupiter's power is poisoned or corrupted and will one day bring about his demise. The image of a snake also connects the Demogorgon to the figure of Satan and reflects the

Romantic's use of Satan as a heroic, knowledge-giving figure, who opposes omnipotent authority; the Demogorgon will similarly help release Prometheus, who represents knowledge.

Act 2, Scene 4 Quotes

❝ Who reigns? There was the Heaven and Earth at first
And Light and Love;—then Saturn, from whose throne
Time fell, an envious shadow; such the state
Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway
As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves
Before the wind or sun has withered them
And semivital worms; but he refused
The birthright of their being, knowledge, power,
The skill which wields the elements, the thought
Which pierces this dim Universe like light,
Self-empire and the majesty of love,
For thirst of which they fainted. Then Prometheus
Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter
And with this Law alone: "Let man be free,"
Clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven.

Related Characters: Asia (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter, Demogorgon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.4.32-46

Explanation and Analysis

Asia describes the origins of the world to the Demogorgon and describes Prometheus's role in giving Jupiter sovereignty over mankind. In classical mythology, Saturn is Jupiter's father and ruled over Earth and the gods. Shelley uses the themes of classical mythology (such as the rivalries between parents and children, and battles between the Titans and the gods) and suggests that Saturn was the original ruler of the planet, but that Prometheus helped Jupiter overthrow him by giving Jupiter knowledge. Saturn had access to knowledge but "refused" to share it with humanity. Knowledge is connected to fire as it is a tool that helps humanity "wield the elements." Knowledge is also connected with light, as intelligent thought is described as "piercing the dim Universe like light." This reflects the association of Prometheus with light and the sun, as Prometheus is destined to give knowledge back to humanity.

Saturn is also accused of inventing Time, which held "earth's primal spirits" in its "sway." This reflects the implication in Shelley's poem that living things are slaves to time because everything on earth is perishable and, therefore, constrained by time. Time is personified in the poem in the figures of the Hours, who were originally Saturn's servants and are now Jupiter's. While Jupiter had the opportunity to be a benign ruler, and to "let man be free," he has misused his power and become a tyrant like his father.

❝ First famine and then toil and then disease,
Strife, wounds, and ghastly death unseen before,
Fell; and the unseasonable seasons drove,
With alternating shafts of frost and fire,
Their shelterless, pale tribes to mountain caves;
And in their desert hearts fierce wants he sent
And mad disquietudes, and shadows idle
Of unreal good, which levied mutual war,
So ruining the lair w herein they raged.
Prometheus saw, and waked the legioned hopes
Which sleep within folded Elysian flowers,
Nepenthe, Moly, Amaranth, fadeless bloom
That they might hide with thin and rainbow wings
The shape of Death; and Love he sent to bind
The disunited tendrils of that vine
Which bears the wine of life, the hum an heart;
And he tamed fire, which like some beast of prey
Most terrible, but lovely, played beneath
The frown of man [...]

Related Characters: Asia (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.4.50-69

Explanation and Analysis

Asia describes the state of humanity under Jupiter's reign, before Prometheus was chained to the mountain, and after Prometheus had given Jupiter the power to reign under the condition that he "let man be free." Jupiter, however, became a tyrant, so Prometheus gave humans fire so that they might subdue their hostile environment for themselves. Under Jupiter's negligent reign, and without knowledge to help them combat the elements or develop their intelligence, mankind struggles to survive. Asia describes the unpleasant conditions for man while Jupiter

withheld knowledge from them. They were unable to combat the seasons or the bad weather and unable to invent medicines to serve as pain relief or to cure diseases. They were also beset by "mad disquietudes," which suggests mental illness, delusional desires, or passions such as anger or greed that create and perpetuate suffering among mankind.

Prometheus, witnessing this, gave humanity knowledge so that they could conquer these problems themselves. As Prometheus is symbolic of knowledge and freedom of thought, it is important to Shelley's poem that he does not solve humanity's problems for them but gives them a means to solve problems themselves. Providing them with fire allows them to create heat, light, and tools. Prometheus also sends Love to dwell among humanity. This, coupled with the image of love "binding the disunited tendrils" of life's vine, reflects Shelley's idea that knowledge without love does not produce the ideal outcomes.

> He gave man speech, and speech created thought,
> Which is the measure of the Universe;
> And Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven,
> Which shook but fell not; and the harmonious mind
> Poured itself forth in all-prophetic song,
> And music lifted up the listening spirit
> Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,
> Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound;
> And human hands first mimicked and then mocked
> With moulded limbs more lovely than its own
> The human form , till marble grew divine,
> And others, gazing, drank the love men see
> Reflected in their race—behold, and perish.—
> He told the hidden power of herbs and springs,
> And Disease drank and slept—Death grew like sleep.—

Related Characters: Asia (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.4.72-86

Explanation and Analysis

Asia describes the arts, which humanity created using the knowledge and the gift of fire that Prometheus gave them against Jupiter's will. It is implied that Prometheus's gift of knowledge allowed humanity to develop complex intelligence, including things like speech, thought, and self-awareness. The idea that "thought is the measure of the universe" suggests the philosopher Descartes' theory that man understands the world through thought, coining the famous phrase:], "I think therefore I am." Although Shelley was distrustful of an over-reliance on Enlightenment ideas of rationality and social order, he admired the intellectual principals behind the Enlightenment, which sought truth and knowledge and challenged ignorance and established authorities.

Asia observes the "Science struck the thrones of Earth and Heaven which shook but did not fall." This reflects Shelley's belief that knowledge and intellectual discovery present a challenge to established powers, such as the Church or the Monarchy. Although science has not toppled either of these powers in Shelley's society, Shelley recognizes that scientific advancements have at least shaken the Church and Monarchy, and he predicts their decline across future generations. Prometheus's gift of knowledge also allows humanity to invent the arts, which makes people "godlike" in their ability to create and suggests that people can be individual powers themselves rather than relying on traditional rulers.

> Such the alleviations of his state
> Prometheus gave to man—for which he hangs
> Withering in destined pain—but who rains down
> Evil, the immedicable plague, which while
> Man looks on his creation like a God
> And sees that it is glorious, drives him on,
> The wreck of his own will, the scorn of Earth,
> The outcast, the abandoned, the alone?—
> Not Jove: while yet his frown shook Heaven, aye when
> His adversary' from adamantine' chains
> Cursed him, he trembled like a slave. Declare
> Who is his master? Is he too a slave?

Related Characters: Asia (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter, Demogorgon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.4.98-109

Explanation and Analysis

Asia tells the Demogorgon that Prometheus is being punished for giving humanity knowledge, and that without this knowledge, humanity is leading the world to destruction. She asks the Demogorgon who Jupiter's master is, as she does not believe that a ruler as weak as Jupiter can be a truly omnipotent force. By describing the achievements of humanity, which Prometheus's gift has

made possible, Asia highlights Jupiter's cruelty in punishing Prometheus, as well as the corruption of Jupiter's leadership. Jupiter's power only benefits him because humanity is not better off without knowledge. The lack of knowledge among humanity also leads to detrimental effects on nature and the planet. This is suggested by the image of man "look[ing] on his creation like a God" and driving on "the wreck of his own will." This suggests that, without knowledge or the love Prometheus gave them to temper knowledge, humanity is unable to recognize that they are destroying the planet through unchecked industrial advancement. This reflects Shelley's anxieties about modernization in the nineteenth century.

Asia feels that Jupiter cannot be a truly powerful God because he "trembled like a slave" when Prometheus "cursed him," and, therefore, his power must be tenuous and easily overthrown. If Jupiter had real confidence in his own power, he would not keep Prometheus chained to protect himself. Asia's comments support Shelley's idea that power gained by force or violence is not real power. Although Jupiter has enslaved the world, he too is a slave to his own lust for power.

> Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change?—To these
> All things are subject but eternal Love.

So much I asked before, and my heart gave
The response thou hast given; and of such truths
Each to itself must be the oracle.—
One more demand . . . and do thou answer me
As my own soul would answer, did it know
That which I ask.—Prometheus shall arise
Henceforth the Sun of this rejoicing world:
When shall the destined hour arrive?

Related Characters: Asia, Demogorgon (speaker), Prometheus, Jupiter, Panthea

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.4.119-128

Explanation and Analysis

Asia and Panthea are in the lair of the Demogorgon, and Asia has explained to him the history of the world and Prometheus's imprisonment. She asks the Demogorgon to explain who the true ruler of Earth is, as she does not believe it is Jupiter. The Demogorgon tells Asia that all the powerful forces in the world, which dictate the fate of humanity, are subject to "eternal Love." Although Love has been temporarily deposed by ruin and destruction under Jupiter's reign, Love is still the most powerful force in the world, which is why tyrants like Jupiter try to keep it restrained.

Asia responds that she has always instinctively known this; Asia is a sea nymph and is associated throughout the poem with the goddess Venus, the classical goddess of love. Asia's innate understanding that Love is the most powerful force in the world supports the idea that she was once a goddess of love but has been subdued by Jupiter's evil influence. Asia now understands that when Prometheus is freed, love will be set free in the world. She compares this love, and Prometheus as an embodiment of this love, as a "sun" rising on the world. This connects Prometheus to the figure of Christ, who is often associated with the sun rising on the world and driving out darkness, sin, and death.

> The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night I see
> Cars drawn by rainbow-winged steeds
Which trample the dim winds—in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer, urging their flight.
Some look behind, as fiends pursued them there
And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars:
Others with burning eyes lean forth, and drink
With eager lips the wind of their own speed
As if the thing they loved fled on before
And now—even now' they clasped it; their bright locks
Stream like a comet's flashing hair: they all
Sweep onward.—

Related Characters: Asia, Demogorgon (speaker), Panthea

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2.4.129-139

Explanation and Analysis

The Demogorgon shows Asia and Panthea the Hours, who drive around the world in chariots in an endless circle. The Hours are literal personifications of time, as it is divided up into moments and hours. The Hours are Jupiter's servants who enslave humanity by dividing their lives into units of time, which also represents mortality. This is an example of Shelley's use of metaphors and symbolism to express

aspects of psychological experience. For example, some of the Hours hurry their chariots along, which reflects the experience of wishing that time would pass more quickly. Others "lean forth" and drink "their own speed," which reflects the experience of time passing by quickly so that it seems impossible to appreciate or fully enjoy.

The Hours are depicted as extensions of Jupiter because they do his bidding in the world. They are described as charioteers, which mimics an earlier description of Jupiter, who holds the reins of power like a "fiend-drawn charioteer." The Hours also literally encircle the Earth; the symbolizes constraints or bonds encircling a prisoner, and reflects the round face of a clock, around which the Hours travel. Shelley felt that modern, industrial society placed too much emphasis on time and that the hours of the work day were a form of enslavement, dictating how a person could spend their time.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.
All else has been subdued to me—alone
The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,
Yet burns towards Heaven with fierce reproach and doubt
And lamentation and reluctant prayer,
Hurling up insurrection, which might make
Our antique empire insecure, though built
On eldest faith, and Hell's coeval, fear.
And though my curses through the pendulous air
Like snow on herbless peaks, fall flake by flake
And cling to it—though under my wrath's night
It climb the crags of life, step after step,
Which wound it, as ice wounds unsandalled feet,
It yet remains supreme o'er misery,
Aspiring . . . unrepressed; yet soon to fall:

Related Characters: Jupiter (speaker), Prometheus, Asia, Demogorgon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.1.3-17

Explanation and Analysis

In heaven, Jupiter addresses a congregation of gods and celebrates his omnipotence. Although Jupiter knows that he has not quite subdued humanity, he has produced a child with the goddess Thetis, the Demogorgon, whom he believes will be more powerful than him and will help him rule. In this passage, Jupiter reuses the metaphor of fire as a symbol of man's power and knowledge. While Prometheus views fire as a positive tool to give humanity, Jupiter views fire and knowledge as a threat to his power and something that should be "extinguished." Jupiter does not care for humanity's wellbeing, or the fact that humanity is "reproachful" towards him, but only cares about maintaining his own power. He acknowledges that humanity's hatred of him and reluctance to worship him could threaten his empire, which is built on intimidation and fear rather than real power through love.

Jupiter describes the curses he uses to quell mankind's resistance as falling on humanity like snow, "flake by flake." This is the opposite of Asia's use of the metaphor of gathering snowflakes, culminating in an avalanche, to symbolize resistance to Jupiter's reign gathering among individuals. Although Jupiter is convinced that man's resistance to him is "soon to fall," the reader knows that this is not true because of the prophecy that Prometheus will overthrow Jupiter and the knowledge that the Demogorgon is helping Asia. Jupiter's curses are only the work of one man, and thus have no power over the resistance of thousands. It is, therefore, ironic that Jupiter reuses these phrases right before his fall.

Act 3, Scene 4 Quotes

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats and prisons; wherein
And beside which, by wretched men were borne
Sceptres, tiaras, swords and chains, and tomes
Of reasoned wrong glozed on by ignorance,
Were like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
The ghosts of a no more remembered fame,
Which from their unworn obelisks look forth
In triumph o'er the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors, mouldering round.
Those imaged to the pride of Kings and Priests
A dark yet mighty faith, a power as wide
As is the world it wasted, and are now
But an astonishment; even so the tools
And emblems of its last captivity
Amid the dwellings of the peopled Earth,
Stand, not o'erthrown, but unregarded now.

Related Characters: Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, Ione

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3.4.164-179

Explanation and Analysis

When Prometheus is freed, Ione sends the Spirit of the Hour to circle the earth once more and tells him blow into a shell, which contains the music of love, so that everyone on Earth will hear it. The Spirit of the Hour returns and tells Prometheus, Asia, Ione, and Panthea about the change that he witnessed on Earth. The Spirit of the Hour says that he has seen "thrones, alters, judgement-seats, and prisons," all of which are now empty. Before Jupiter's fall, the Spirit of the Hour says that these institutions used to stand beside "wretched men" holding "scepters, chains, and swords" and wearing "tiaras." This represents the idea that powerful institutions, which rule nations and instill fear in people through the threat of punishment, are propped up by "wretched men" who seek power ("scepters") and wealth ("tiaras") through violence ("swords"). This highlights Shelley's antagonism towards institutions of power, such as the Monarchy, the Church, and the justice system, which he feels are corrupt and based in giving power and privilege to a handful of elite rulers.

Shelley feels that these powerful institutions are only kept in place by "ignorance" among the populace, who are too complacent with the established social order to challenge existing forms of power. In the description of the renewed world, these monuments to power and symbols of power stand "not o'erthrown" but "mouldering" and "unregarded." This reflects Shelley's belief that passive resistance is a more effective means of challenging power than acts of violent revolution.

Act 4 Quotes

❝ We come from the mind
Of human kind
Which was late so dusk and obscene and blind;
Now tis an Ocean
Of clear emotion,
A Heaven of serene and mighty motion.

From that deep Abyss
Of wonder and bliss
Whose caverns are chrystal palaces;
From those skiey towers
Where Thought's crowned Powers
Sit watching your dance, ye happy Hours!

Related Characters: Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, Ione

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.93-104

Explanation and Analysis

After Prometheus has been set free, Panthea and Ione fall asleep outside the cave where Prometheus now lives with his wife, Asia. They wake to see the Hours, joined by the "spirits of the human mind," holding a funeral for the King of the Hours. The fall of Jupiter has led to the death of time, which is literally represented through the death of the King of the Hours. Although time still exists, it no longer enslaves humanity, and instead of being unable to control it, they can make time suit their own needs and purposes. The image of "Thought's crowned Powers" watching the "dance" of the hours suggests that, rather than hurrying through a work day and forcing oneself to meet the constraints of time, thought is now the master of time, and humans can spend however long they like in contemplation, rather than having time-bound tasks to attend to.

The Hour's song also meditates upon the change that has come over humanity since Jupiter's fall. Ignorance is now in decline, and humanity is no longer "dusk, obscene, and blind." Instead, knowledge is free among mankind and illuminates life for humanity. This reflects the connection between knowledge and light in the poem. The idea that time and the human mind are engaged in a harmonious dance with each other also suggests that humanity has undergone a positive change and can now live in, and fully appreciate, the present moment rather than being slave to time.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance,—
These are the seals of that most firm assurance
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
Mother of many acts and hours, should free
The serpent that would clasp her with his length,—
These are the spells by which to reassume
An empire o'er the disentangled Doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night
To defy Power which seems Omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change nor falter nor repent:
This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory.

Related Characters: Demogorgon (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.562-578

Explanation and Analysis

The Demogorgon addresses the world, which answers as one united voice, and tells them how to release love back into the world if destruction and tyranny ever hold love captive again. The Demogorgon, who is privy to some secrets of the universe, tells the world that "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance" are the traits that keep violence and destruction contained. The Demogorgon acknowledges that during the whole of Eternity, humanity may become misguided again and fall into the hands of tyranny and ignorance. If they do so, the Demogorgon advises that humans should use the "spell" of love, compassion, wisdom, and non-violent resistance to find their way back to a state of harmony. This reflects Shelley's view that love is stronger than hate, and that forgiveness and compassion are more productive impulses than violence or revenge.

Shelley reinforces this point in the Demogorgon's closing words. The Demogorgon advises that people should "suffer woes," even if there seems to be no hope of alleviation for this suffering, as long as this suffering is for a good cause. Prometheus is a symbol of this notion through his relentless, resistance to Jupiter, which he continued despite feeling that his torment was infinite. His reward has been Love's return to humanity and the planet. Prometheus is like Christ in that his single but profound act of sacrifice has brought "glory" to the world. Shelley also wishes his readers to take the advice of the Demogorgon and feels that if poetry spreads a message of hope and compassion, then people in the real world may emulate such love and compassion.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

Shelley opens *Prometheus Unbound* with a "Preface." He explains the Greek origins of the Prometheus story and highlights the fact that classical authors often adapted material, which had been used many times before by poets and playwrights, and that they often made changes to these stories in their own versions to better suit their aims in retelling the story. Shelley notes that in the version of the Prometheus story which he has adapted, by the classical author Aeschylus, Prometheus reaches a compromise with Jupiter, the tyrant ruler of the world. In his own version of *Prometheus Unbound* however, Shelley states that he has avoided "reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind" to better suit the thematic aims of his "fable."

Shelley uses his Preface to acknowledge Aeschylus's version of the Prometheus story, which he has adapted for his poem. He notes that classical authors often adapted the old stories, showing that there is a precedent for this in the European literary tradition and to justify himself doing so in Prometheus Unbound. *Shelley was a Romantic poet, and the Romantics prized originality highly, so it makes sense that Shelley feels the need to explain why he has not created an original story. By calling his work a "fable," Shelley suggests that* Prometheus Unbound *has a clear message that he wants his readers to understand. This message has to do with uncompromising resistance to oppression, which is why Shelley chooses to deviate from Aeschylus's version of the story.*

Shelley compares his hero, Prometheus, with the biblical character of Satan, whom he also calls "the Hero of *Paradise Lost*," which is an epic poem by John Milton. He says that Prometheus is like Satan, but that Prometheus is a better and "more poetical" character than Satan because he is free from "the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandizement" which Shelley feels corrupt Satan's personality. Prometheus, in contrast to Satan, is a moral character who has "the truest motives to the best and noblest ends."

Paradise Lost, an epic poem by John Milton written in 1667, heavily influenced the Romantic movement and Romantic poets like Shelley. The Romantics felt that Milton's personification of Satan in Paradise Lost *framed Satan as the hero of the story because he is determined to provide humans with knowledge against the wishes of God, who is an omnipotent authority. However, while the Romantics admired Satan's heroic qualities in Milton's poem, Shelley recognizes that Satan is an evil character because he is envious and vengeful towards mankind and does not offer them knowledge to help them but, instead, to simply spite God. Prometheus, on the other hand, is well-meaning towards humanity* and *is free from the evil qualities associated with Satan.*

Shelley explains that he composed his poem in Italy surrounded by beautiful landscapes, and that he was inspired by the arrival of spring in "that divinest climate." He notes that the imagery in his poem is inspired by the internal workings of the "human mind," which he feels is uncommon in modern poetry but is prevalent in the work of earlier, dramatic writers such as Shakespeare or Dante. He feels he is most inspired by classical, Greek writers who were able to "awaken" any type of emotion in their audience. However, he notes that people cannot help being influenced by the contemporary work they read and the age in which they live, and that while many writers may be able to imitate classical form, they may lack the talent, or the "lightning of their own mind[s]," to bring these subjects to life.

Shelley feels that beautiful landscapes provide poets with artistic inspiration. However, Shelley is also interested in representing human emotion, which he feels is best conveyed through imagery inspired by nature. The Romantics felt that pre-Enlightenment writers, like Shakespeare and Dante, were superior to Enlightenment and contemporary authors. The Romantics felt that the Enlightenment period produced bad poetry because it encouraged a rational, unemotional approach to life and preferred empirical observation of the natural world to artistic appreciation of it. Shelley uses a metaphor from nature, the "lightning of their own mind[s]," to demonstrate how effective nature is in portraying emotional experience.

Shelley notes that the great writers of the "golden age of our literature" were inspired by the "awakening of the public mind," and that the "great writers" of his own period are also the "forerunners of some unimagined change" in society.

The "golden age" of literature that Shelley refers to is the Renaissance, which was a period of scientific, philosophical, and artistic development spanning from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century in Europe. Shelley feels that great literature is revolutionary because it rebels against established order in society and inspires real social change. He feels that society is changing around him and that "great writers" of his own age will document and encourage these changes.

Shelley describes poetry as a "mimetic art," or an art which relies on imitation. He notes that poets are inspired by their own minds, by beautiful scenes from nature, and from beautiful descriptions of nature that they read in the work of other poets. "Every man's mind" is "a mirror upon which all forms are reflected" and, therefore, poetical minds are inspired by everything that they see and read. There are similarities between classical authors such as Aeschylus and Hesiod, and if their beautiful works are "the result of imitation," then Shelley is happy to admit that he has imitated while writing *Prometheus Unbound*.

Shelley observes that poets are inspired by everything they see and read, and that men's minds are like "mirrors." This suggests that Shelley is trying to justify his choice to reuse an old story, rather than invent a new one. He strengthens his justification by noting that even writers whom he greatly admires, like Aeschylus and Hesiod, were influenced by what they heard and experienced; since he is aspiring to be like them, this justifies his recycling of the Prometheus story.

Shelley confesses that he has a "passion for reforming the world" but that he abhors "didactic poetry" and wishes to inspire his readers with visions of "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence." He feels that "until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope" then moral lessons are "like seeds cast upon the highway of life" and will be "trampled into the dust."

Although Shelley wishes to convey a message of social change to the reader, he does not wish his poem to be "didactic," or purely read for educational purposes. Instead, he wishes his poem to be read artistically and with an appreciation for beautiful language. He feels that people will be unable to comprehend moral teaching until they can appreciate artistic and natural beauty, so it is noble to be a poet and to inspire these emotions in people.

Shelley feels compelled to write poetry and believes that people who are driven to produce art have a duty to use their abilities. If his efforts are unsuccessful, he implores the reader to "let the punishment of an unaccomplished purpose be sufficient" and not to draw attention to his poor attempt in case this makes his work famous "which might otherwise have been unknown."

Romantic poets, like Shelley, viewed art as extremely socially important and felt that it was an act of social duty to produce art if one had an inclination or a talent towards it. They believed that art and poetry could reform society.

ACT 1

Prometheus is bound to a mountaintop in the Indian Caucasus. Panthea and Ione, two sea nymphs, are seated at his feet. It is dark but near dawn. Prometheus addresses Jupiter as the "Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits but One" and calls for him to look upon the earth, over which he is the supreme ruler and which he has made "multitudinous with his slaves."

Prometheus is a character from classical mythology. In classical myth, Prometheus was chained to a mountaintop for all eternity for giving humanity fire; an act that went against the will of the gods. Prometheus addresses Jupiter because Jupiter is omnipotent over all beings in the universe except Prometheus himself.

Despite Jupiter's power, Prometheus claims his own "empire" is more beautiful than the view that Jupiter has from his "unenvied throne," which Prometheus could have shared if he had "deigned to" instead of being "nailed" to the mountainside. Although he is in pain, Prometheus "endures." He describes his suffering when the freezing winter cold eats into him, when "Heaven's winged hound" mauls him, and when the Earthquakes and the storms shake him.

Prometheus only has power over himself and, even then, only over his own mind since his body is chained to the mountain by Jupiter. However, he does not envy Jupiter's power and would not accept this sort of power even if it was offered to him. Despite his terrible suffering, Prometheus "endures" and stands by his decision to oppose Jupiter.

Despite this, Prometheus still enjoys watching the Hours pass, as he knows that one of these hours will contain the moment in which Jupiter will "kiss the blood" from Prometheus's feet before he is pursued "undefended through wide Heaven" by some terrible force. Prometheus no longer hates Jupiter, and instead pities him, because has been made "wise" by his suffering. He now cannot remember the curse he once uttered against Jupiter.

Prometheus is confident that Jupiter will suffer negative consequences because he has abused his power. When this happens, Prometheus knows Jupiter will beg for his forgiveness. Prometheus pities Jupiter because he knows that Jupiter will inevitably be punished for his actions. Prometheus has become more compassionate and forgiving through his suffering as he does not want others to suffer the way that he does.

Although Prometheus feels that all hate is "dead within" him, he asks the elements—the air, the mountains, the springs, and the whirlwinds—if they remember the curse he spoke against Jupiter, which terrified them and made them fall silent when Prometheus spoke.

Prometheus has become so compassionate during his torture that he has even forgotten the curse that he spoke against Jupiter when he was first chained to the mountain. The elements are personified in Shelley's poem and are capable of feeling and speaking. This reflects Shelley's interest in pantheism (the belief that the whole universe contains God) and his interest in classical and pagan mythology in which natural forces were often given personalities.

The mountains reply that Prometheus's curse made them "tremble" as never before. The springs reply that they had never carried such a terrible sound to the sea before and that a "pilot asleep on the howling sea" spontaneously went mad and died as soon as the curse ran into the ocean. The air says that his cry caused the day to go dark, and the whirlwinds reply that they fell silent when they heard it, "though silence is a hell" to them. The Earth then states that the hills and the oceans cried "Misery!" when the curse was spoken and that the "pale nations" heard it too.

The fact that the elements fell silent when they heard Prometheus's curse suggests that he is more powerful than these mighty natural forces. Prometheus is a Titan (a classical deity whose mother is the Earth) and, therefore, is an extremely powerful being. Prometheus represents freedom for the natural elements and mankind, the inhabitants of the "pale nations," and that is why they cry "Misery!" when he is captured. Prometheus also speaks his curse in anger and hatred, and this spreads anger and hatred on earth because, in Shelley's poem, Prometheus's actions affect the whole of humanity. This is based in Christ's message that hurting one person is the same as hurting the whole of humanity and demonstrates Shelley's combination of classicism and Christianity in his poem.

Prometheus cannot hear the elements' responses and asks if they have forgotten him: he who "made his agony the barrier" between them and their "else all-conquering foe" who would have trampled the world like a "fiend-drawn charioteer." The Earth tells him that the elements "dare not" speak up, and Prometheus begins to hear a strange whisper, which "tingles" through him the way that "lightning tingles, hovering ere it strikes." The Earth tells him that these are the voices of the dead and that he cannot understand them because he is immortal. The Earth "dares not" translate for him into the language of "life" lest the ruler of Heaven should punish her.

Prometheus is the only "barrier" between the world and the total omnipotent rule of Jupiter. Prometheus's description of Jupiter as a "fiend-drawn charioteer" suggests that he is driving the world in a bad direction and foreshadows Shelley's personification of the Hours as wild charioteers who drive time along and make humanity slaves to the passage of time. The Earth insinuates that everything in the world has been metaphorically dead since Jupiter took control, as she no longer speaks in the language of "life." This suggests that nothing on the planet or in nature speaks this language anymore. Jupiter's reign, therefore, spreads death, as he does not permit the language of life to be used.

Prometheus asks the Earth, whose voice he does not recognize, who she is, and the Earth explains that she is his mother. She describes Prometheus's birth and the joy this brought her, how the downtrodden people of the Earth "uplifted their prostrate brows" when they heard him speak and how the "almighty Tyrant" "grew pale." When Jupiter bound Prometheus to the mountain, the Earth was racked with grief and unleashed "strange tempests." Plague and famine flourished, and the air became contaminated "with the contagion of a mother's hate." Still, she remembers Prometheus's curse and secretly repeats it as a mantra of hope which she "dares not speak" out loud.

In classical mythology the Earth, or the goddess Gaia, is the mother of the Titans. Prometheus, who gave humanity fire and knowledge, represents hope for mankind and allowed them to rise above ignorance and confusion. Prometheus's gift of knowledge to humanity is perceived as a threat by Jupiter, as knowledge allows humans to think for themselves and potentially question his authority. Jupiter's imprisonment of Prometheus has caused a rift between humanity and nature so that they can no longer exist harmoniously but must struggle to survive alongside each other. Prometheus's curse and defiance of Jupiter gives the Earth hope that Jupiter will fall, and that harmony will exist again between man and nature.

Prometheus begs to hear the curse. The Earth calls up the Phantasm of Jupiter from the shadow world to repeat it so that Jupiter himself cannot punish anything on earth for speaking the words. Ione and Panthea tremble with fear as the Phantasm approaches: "clothed in dark purple" with a "scepter of pale gold" in his hand.

The Earth's fear that Jupiter will punish her suggests that Jupiter is a cruel ruler. This is reinforced by the fact that Ione and Panthea are afraid of the Phantasm of Jupiter. Jupiter's costume aligns him with worldly powers, such as the Pope, who is the head of the Catholic Church and carries a golden staff and wears decorative robes.

The Phantasm of Jupiter is forced to speak the curse. The curse invites Jupiter to unleash all his torments on Prometheus, who is the "only being" that Jupiter "will not subdue." Prometheus vows to dedicate himself to "sleepless agony" while Jupiter "must reign on high" and hopes that his "sufferers curse" will haunt Jupiter and cause his power to become a "crown of pain." He hopes that one day Jupiter's external appearance will show the reality of his internal character and that, finally, Jupiter will fall.

Prometheus's curse defies Jupiter's power and suggests that nothing Jupiter can do will subdue Prometheus—Prometheus is determined to oppose Jupiter's reign even if he is the only being to do so. Prometheus is an example of a Romantic hero because he is willing to alienate himself from the rest of society rather than conform to something that he feels is morally wrong. Romantic poets like Shelley valued individual heroism as a powerful force against authority and corruption. In his curse, Prometheus hopes that Jupiter's actions and misuse of his power will come back to haunt him.

When he hears the curse, Prometheus laments that he once wished pain upon Jupiter, as he no longer wishes any "living thing to suffer." The Earth cries out that Prometheus is vanquished, but Ione contradicts her and says that it is nothing "but some passing spasm." She points out that there is a spirit traveling towards them through the dawn. Panthea recognizes the "world-wandering herald," Mercury, and that the Furies, "Jove's tempest-walking hounds," follow behind.

Prometheus's suffering has made him more empathetic and compassionate; he no longer wishes any being to suffer because he has experienced firsthand how awful it is. Although the Earth think this shows weakness, it really shows strength, as Prometheus has found the strength and compassion to forgive Jupiter despite Jupiter's cruelty. Meanwhile, Jupiter, who is omnipotent and does not understand Prometheus's compassion, thinks forgiveness is a sign of weakness and sends Mercury to try and bargain with Prometheus while he is vulnerable.

Mercury holds back the Furies while he begs Prometheus to accept a compromise with Jupiter in order to win his freedom. Prometheus refuses and claims that "evil minds change good to their own nature." He says that he gave Jupiter his power, and that Jupiter has repaid him by punishing and torturing him and by letting his "thought-executing ministers" oppress humanity.

Mercury demonstrates that he is a weak character because does not like seeing Prometheus suffer at Jupiter's hands but is too afraid to oppose Jupiter and continues to act as his messenger. Mercury tries to convince Prometheus that compromising with Jupiter is a moral thing to do, but Prometheus feels that "evil" people delude themselves into thinking that their actions are good when really their actions are selfish. Jupiter is "thought-executing," as he does not allow freedom of thought or knowledge among mankind.

Defeated, Mercury retreats and the Furies swarm Prometheus, mocking and taunting him. Although Prometheus is horrified by the Furies, he pities them because they are evil and can know nothing good. Prometheus invites them to torture him as he knows that he is "king over" himself and "rules" the pain which they administer. More Furies arrive and one of them tries to frighten Prometheus with a vision of Hell. Another Fury stops this since Prometheus "yet defies the deepest powers of Hell." The Furies then taunt Prometheus for giving man knowledge, which "kindled within him a thirst which outran" and filled him with desire that "consumes him."

Prometheus can withstand the Furies' torture because he has fully accepted his own decision to let himself be tortured and feels that it is both the right thing to do and worth the sacrifice of himself. This gives Prometheus immense self-control and allows him to even pity the Furies, who, unlike him, do not control their own feelings or behavior but are slaves to evil and to Jupiter. The Furies are afraid to tell Prometheus what is in hell because they fear that, once he knows, he will cease to be afraid of it. This suggests that hell has no real power, and that its power comes from individual's imagination. The Furies refer to knowledge among mankind as a destructive force, which causes man more harm than good because it is being used irresponsibly. This is supported by the symbol of fire as knowledge, because fire has the capacity to be both a useful and a dangerous element.

The Furies show Prometheus that one man "of gentle worth" did visit humanity, but that his message "outlived him" and became poisoned. They show Prometheus cities spewing smoke and crying out in despair and claim that they hear the gentle man's ghost "wailing" for the message he gave out, which only a few people now worship "in dread." They show this man bleeding and a hopeful nation transformed into a violent, murderous regime. Panthea and Ione also see these images, when they glance up from where they are hiding, and at one point see a "youth with patient looks nailed to a crucifix." Prometheus weeps for this man and cries that he will not speak his name as "it hath become a curse."

The Furies refer to Jesus Christ and suggest that his teachings about compassion and love have been misused by the Church. Shelley was an atheist and felt that the Church was an extremely corrupt institution; however, he deeply admired Christ's message of forgiveness and compassion and felt that Christ would be horrified by the ways in which the Church had used and distorted this message to gain power for themselves and to frighten and control the populace. The "youth" whom Ione and Panthea see is Christ, who is being crucified. The "hopeful nation" refers to France in the early stages of the French Revolution, which took place in 1780s and 90s, and which Shelley was politically influenced by. Shelley supported anti-establishment rebellion but was disappointed by the outcome of the French Revolution. Although it began as a rebellion against the French monarchy, who had been starving the French people, and sought liberty and equality for all, it turned violent and descended into a "murderous regime."

The Furies tell Prometheus that worse things than violence lurk within men's minds, and that humanity exists in a state of "hypocrisy and custom"; they do not care for each other and "the powerful lack all goodness," while the "wise lack love."

Shelley disliked the strict forms of etiquette and social custom which ruled Enlightenment society and which, he felt, placed restrictions on people's self-expression and prevented them from being honest about their emotions. In Shelley's mind, this lack of emotional honesty and understanding leads to confusion and suffering, which consequently leads to a general lack of understanding and compassion among people. Romanticism as a movement prioritized emotional expression and non-conformity over the Enlightenment values of social order and rational objectivity.

The Furies vanish, and Prometheus repeats his mantra of defiance. He states that the visions with which the Furies tortured him have only increased his determination to endure. The Earth sends good spirits to comfort Prometheus, and they tell him of a prophecy of love and hope that "begins and ends in" him. Ione sees two doves, and she and Panthea weep over their song. The spirits tell Prometheus that, in the prophecy they bear, he will "kill the horseman grim." The spirits vanish, and Prometheus laments his destined role as the "savior" of mankind. Panthea reminds him that he is loved, by herself and Ione, and by his wife, Asia, whom Panthea then departs to visit.

While Jupiter intends to break Prometheus's spirit by torturing him, this actually makes Prometheus more *determined to resist Jupiter, as he understands that Jupiter uses cruel, tyrannical measures to maintain power. This confirms Prometheus's belief that someone must stand against Jupiter, even if this means suffering for his defiance. The prophecy "begins and ends" in Prometheus because it relies entirely on him, and his continued resistance. The idea that Prometheus will kill "the horseman grim" suggests that Prometheus will kill death, which, under Jupiter's reign, humanity is subject to. Prometheus's title as "savior" links him to the figure of Christ who, in Christianity, triumphed over death through love and compassion for humankind.*

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Asia, Prometheus's wife, sits alone in a fertile valley in the Indian Caucuses. She is waiting for her sister, Panthea, to arrive and, while she does, she notices that spring is breaking in the valley. She observes that Panthea, who usually visits her at sunrise, is late and that the "wingless moments crawl" like "death-worms."

Spring is a common symbol of new life, and in the context of Christianity it is often associated with the hope of new life after death. This reflects Shelley's combination of Christianity and pantheism. Under Jupiter's reign, Asia is a slave to time, which moves slowly and prevents her happiness.

Panthea arrives and explains that she is late because of a troubled sleep in which she had two strange dreams. In one of the dreams, Prometheus was set free, and she was overcome with love until their spirits mingled together and she was "absorbed." The other dream she cannot remember. Asia looks into Panthea's eyes to try to divine the dream and is startled to see a shape moving there which beckons her to "follow." Panthea cries that this shape is the dream that she had forgotten. The dream "passes into" her mind and invites her to follow. Echoes then begin in the air, calling to Asia that there is a "voice unspoken" in the world which, "by her step alone, can its rest be broken." Asia and Panthea hurry after the dream.

Panthea's first dream represents the prophecy that love will come into the world when Prometheus is free. It also reflects the idea that Prometheus's release will cause a new harmony between beings on earth, and that they will merge together and be "absorbed" because they will recognize that all life is connected. Asia and Panthea are given a task which only they can fulfil. This mirrors the prophecy concerning Prometheus, which suggests that only he can end Jupiter's tyranny.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Asia and Panthea travel through a gloomy forest interspersed with caves and boulders. Two fauns are resting on a nearby rock and the sea nymphs hear a chorus of spirits. The spirits describe the shady vale around them and tell Panthea and Asia that the sun never reaches this part of the forest and that the nightingales are always singing here. The air is full of soft music, which, "by Demogorgon's mighty law," leads spirits through this secret glade to the "fatal mountain."

Fauns are common characters in classical mythology and pastoral poetry, which centers around idealized descriptions of rural life in the paradise of Arcadia. Fauns live in enchanted forests or pastures, which contain nature spirits and nymphs. The gloom of the forest suggests that Panthea and Asia are approaching the realm of night or the abyss where the Demogorgon lives. Nightingales sing in the glade because they are birds that sing at night and are associated with sleep, dreams, and darkness.

The fauns discuss the spirits, commenting that, although they often hear them, they never see them and do not know where the voices come from. One faun says that spirits live in water-flowers that grow at the "bottom of lakes and pools" and send up bubbles. The other comments that if these flowers contain spirits then perhaps other things in nature also contain life. The fauns hurry away to listen to their shepherd telling tales of "fate, and chance, and God, and Chaos old, and love."

Shelley suggests that, although the natural world may not look alive to humans, this does not mean that spirits do not live inside natural things. This is a reference to the pantheism that was popular among Shelley and his Romantic contemporaries. Shelley suggests that mysterious aspects of nature, such as flowers that grow underwater, may have spiritual or supernatural explanations rather than scientific ones. The fauns' description of their shepherd aligns the scene with classical pastoral literature.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Asia and Panthea find themselves on clifftop surrounded by mountains. Panthea recognizes the chasm in the mountain, which they hover above, as the entrance to the lair of the Demogorgon. This entrance is also a spring which sends up "oracular vapor." "Lonely, young men wandering in their youth" drink from this spring and it gives them visions of "truth, virtue, love, genius, and joy," which is "contagion to the world." The vapor affects Panthea and she cries out in worship of the spring. They look down from the mountain on an "avalanche," which reminds Panthea of a mass of "heaven-defying minds" gathering "flake by flake."

Although the spring is associated with sending young men mad, through the strange visions they encounter there, Shelley suggests that it is really the world that is mad and not these men. The visions are seen as "contagion" by the world because they talk about "truth, virtue, love, genius, and joy"—such extreme emotions present a challenge to the powerful forces that wish to keep people unaware of these ideas. The image of the "lonely young men" suggests the Romantic idea of the alienated and misunderstood poetic genius. Although there is ignorance in the world, Shelley suggests that he anticipates change and social reform as more people turn away from old ideas and established institutions. He uses an image from nature to reinforce the link between the natural world and the human mind.

A shape in the mist beckons the two nymphs onwards, and a chorus of spirits calls them to descend "through the shade of sleep" and "through the veil and the bar, of things which seems and are." These spirits lead them down through the abyss where Heaven's light does not reach and where One rules alone. This is "life's portal" through which "the Eternal, the immortal" must travel, and in it sits the "snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne."

The Demogorgon is a spirit of the underworld, which is often associated with the world of the dead. The image of passing through a veil is commonly associated with passing between life and death in nineteenth-century fiction. The Demogorgon is described as "coiled" beneath Jupiter's throne, as he too will have a role in overthrowing Jupiter. The image of a snake links the Demogorgon with Satan and connects Prometheus Unbound to the Romantic idea that Satan is a hero and overthrows God, who is a tyrant.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Asia and Panthea enter the cave of the Demogorgon. A dark, shapeless form, the Demogorgon sits on the throne and asks them what they want to know. Asia responds, "who made the living world" and the suffering in it. The Demogorgon replies that God made the world, but when she asks who made suffering, he replies, "he reigns."

Asia does not believe that God originally allowed suffering into the world. The Demogorgon implies that it is Jupiter who has caused suffering because he has seized power and severed the connection between humanity and God. This is reminiscent of the role of Satan in Christianity, as Satan was an angel who rebelled against God and was promptly cast down to hell.

Asia asks who reigns. She tells the Demogorgon that Heaven, Earth, Light, and Love existed first and then, when gods were born, "time fell" from Saturn's throne. Prometheus gave knowledge to Jupiter and told him to rule but to "let man be free." Jupiter however, let "famine, and then toil, and then disease" fall on man, and he played havoc with nature's seasons. Prometheus saw this and "tamed fire," which gave man tools of "iron and gold"; "the slaves and signs of power." From this power, man developed "speech, and speech created thought" and this created the arts, travel, trade, and science, which quelled "disease and death." For giving this gift to man Prometheus hangs on the mountainside.

Asia explains the origins of the world, as far as she knows it, to the Demogorgon. God, who created the world, created Heaven, Earth, Light, and Love. The introduction of time is associated with the introduction of suffering to the world, as the progression of time introduces mortality and death to human experience. Prometheus tried to prevent this suffering by giving humanity knowledge, symbolized by fire, which allowed them to discover tools, medicine, and ways to prevent death and suffering, but Jupiter removed their access to this knowledge and kept the power for himself by having Prometheus restrained.

Asia then asks who created the suffering which "rains down" on man since Prometheus's imprisonment. She thinks that it cannot be Jupiter because Jupiter "trembles like a slave" at the thought of Prometheus being freed. She wants to know who Jupiter's master is, and the Demogorgon replies that he does not know the secrets of the world but that everything in it is "subject to eternal Love." Asia replies that she has always felt this to be true and that Prometheus is the "sun" who shall arise on the world.

Although Jupiter is the cause of suffering in the world, Asia suspects that Jupiter is not powerful enough to create suffering himself. She believes that Prometheus is more powerful than Jupiter, and that is why Jupiter is afraid of Prometheus. Although Jupiter is powerful, his power is tenuous, and he is subject to more powerful forces. The Demogorgon confirms Asia's suspicious that Love is the most powerful thing in the universe. By comparing Prometheus to the "sun," Asia connects Prometheus with Christ, who is associated with light triumphing over darkness.

The Demogorgon opens the night sky and shows Asia and Panthea a series of chariots racing by, circling around the earth. The Demogorgon tells them that these are the Spirits of the Hours and that One, a spirit "with a dreadful countenance," waits for them. This spirit introduces himself as the "shadow of a destiny," which raises a "terrible shadow" from the Demogorgon's throne. Panthea sees another chariot; this one contains the Spirit of Love. She and Asia ascend in the chariot with the spirit of destiny.

The Hours are personifications of time. Shelley depicts them as charioteers to suggest the speed they travel at and to continue the metaphor of Jupiter as a "fiend-drawn charioteer," because the Hours are Jupiter's slaves and extensions of his will. The Hours consequently enslave humanity because humans are constrained by time. The shadow of destiny represents a moment that is inevitable or has been preordained. The Spirit of Love is separate from the Hours because, unlike the Hours, he is not subject to Jupiter.

ACT 2, SCENE 5

The Spirit of the Hour takes Asia, Panthea, and the Demogorgon into the heart of a cloud. The Spirit tells Asia that "the sun will not rise until noon" because Apollo "is held in Heaven by wonder." Panthea turns pale and Asia asks her what she sees. She replies that a change has taken place in Asia, and that Asia has suddenly become so beautiful that Panthea can hardly look at her. The nymphs recognize that some change has taken place in the world and that Asia is "unveiled," much like the day that Asia rose out of a "veined shell" which drifted on the "crystal ocean" and when Asia used to be known as "love."

In this passage, Asia is associated with Venus, who was the classical goddess of love. It is implied that Asia used to be called Venus, but that she is no longer known under this title because love has been forgotten in the world. In the European artistic tradition, the birth of Venus is often depicted as her rising out of the ocean in a shell. The idea that Asia has been "unveiled" suggests that Jupiter's reign has disguised love and foreshadows his fall, when love will be revealed.

At first Asia dismisses this change and says that "love is common as light." Yet when a voice on the air tells Asia that she is shining with the light of love, she feels her soul floating away on a tide of love.

Although love is a common human experience, this does not detract from its extraordinary power. Asia's transformation suggests that love has the power to elevate and illuminate human life and that, because it is so common, this experience is available to all.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

Jupiter, "on his throne in Heaven," addresses a congregation of fellow deities to celebrate the fact that he is now "omnipotent" over everything in the world. The only thing that still evades his influence is the "soul of man, like unextinguished fire"—yet he assures the gods this is "soon to fall." He tells them that he has produced an offspring, the Demogorgon, who will be more powerful even than himself. He hears the wheels of the chariot approaching and cries "Victory!"

Jupiter acknowledges that he has still not managed to subdue humanity's spirit. This suggests that, although they lack the knowledge to challenge Jupiter's reign, humanity still attempts to resist his rule. The reference to "fire" suggests that Prometheus's influence and the memory of knowledge still lingers in their souls, although Jupiter's reign has oppressed them. Jupiter believes that the Demogorgon, who is his child with the goddess Thetis, will be more powerful than himself and, therefore, will help him achieve total authority over the world.

When the chariot of the Hour arrives, the Demogorgon steps out and approaches Jupiter, who is horrified by its appearance. The Demogorgon demands that Jupiter follow "him down into the abyss," and the two plunge from Heaven; the Demogorgon dragging Jupiter down into his lair.

Jupiter is shocked when he sees the shapeless form of the Demogorgon because he realizes that the Demogorgon comes from the underworld and does not intend to join him in his power but to end his reign and take him to the underworld. Jupiter's literal fall from heaven mirrors Satan's fall from heaven in Christianity.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

Ocean and Apollo stand at the mouth of a river on the island of Atlantis discussing the fall of Jupiter. They have witnessed Jupiter tumbling through the air, entangled with an eagle. Ocean rejoices that his "realm, will heave, unstained with blood" while Apollo celebrates that he will no longer have to look down on "deeds which make his mind obscure with sorrow." They part ways joyfully.

Ocean and Apollo are classical personifications of natural phenomena: the sea and the sun. In this scene, Shelley reinforces the idea that all of nature is affected by human cruelty and suffers when witnessing violence and destruction. This ties in with pantheist ideas, as it suggests that nature is alive, and with Christianity because it suggests that hurting one person means hurting all people.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

On the mountaintop in the Caucuses, Hercules unchains Prometheus. Asia, Ione, Panthea, and the Spirit of the Hour gather around him. Prometheus tells Asia and her sisters of a beautiful cave in Asia's valley where they will live from now on. From this vantage point, they will witness the progress of mankind, who now will develop "arts unimagined" and grow "wise and kind" as "veil by veil, evil and error fall."

Hercules is a hero and a demigod (part god and part mortal) from classical mythology. It was common in epic poetry, and imitations of classical mythology, to include cameos of classical heroes who perform great deeds but do not feature heavily in the action of the story. Here, Hercules performs a heroic act by freeing Prometheus. Meanwhile, the fall of Jupiter allows knowledge to flow freely back into the world, and Prometheus predicts that, with this knowledge, humans will discover new arts and sciences. The image of veils fallings refers to the image of Asia, or love, being unveiled and revealed to the world, just as knowledge now is also revealed.

Prometheus instructs Ione to give the Spirit of the Hour the "curved shell" that was a wedding gift to Asia from "Proteus old." Prometheus then tells the Hour to fly around the world, blowing the shell like a horn and "loosening its mighty music."

In classical mythology, Proteus is a sea god. Asia's shell reflects her connection with Venus and Venus's birth from a shell in the ocean. The Spirit of the Hour is not only a menacing figure, who brings about Jupiter's doom, but also functions as a positive figure, sounding the horn (shell) which alerts humanity that tyranny has fallen, and love is brought back into the world.

Next Prometheus addresses the Earth. She is so delighted by his words that joy runs through her "icy frame" and deadly plants and poisonous insects are transformed into beautiful, nourishing versions of themselves. She also describes a cave "where her spirit was panted forth in anguish" while Prometheus was chained. The cave made those who went there mad, but it is now restored and will be Prometheus's home.

The connection between humanity and nature is reinforced in this passage, as the end of tyranny among mankind also means the rejuvenation of the natural world. The Earth is described like a human body, which is healed by the renewal of love in the world. This suggests that humans and nature are intimately linked and that violence hurts both while love and compassion heals and supports both.

The Earth calls up a childlike messenger, the Spirit of the Earth, to lead Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, and Ione to this cave, where there once was a temple in which people worshipped Prometheus as an emblem of hope.

The Spirit of the Earth is childlike because she is associated with new life, innocence, and purity. Now, as Prometheus and Asia's home, the cave will symbolize hope, knowledge, and love. This will replace the classical temple dedicated to worship of Prometheus. This suggests that people in classical society worshipped knowledge, but that this practice has degenerated in contemporary society. The fall of Jupiter represents a return to this classical reverence of knowledge and reflects Shelley's belief that modern society has deteriorated compared to the classical period.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, and Ione are gathered at their cave in the forest with the Spirit of the Earth. Panthea tells Ione how the Spirit of the Earth used to visit Asia often and that she calls the Spirit mother, although Panthea does not know why.

This passage suggests that the Spirit of the Earth is the offspring of Asia, who symbolizes love, and Prometheus, who symbolizes knowledge and freedom. This reflects Shelley's belief that a combination of these elements will rejuvenate society.

The Spirit of the Earth runs to Asia and expresses her love for her. The Spirit of the Earth then tells Asia about the change that has come over her that day. She tells her that all the insects, "venomous" plants, and "malicious beasts" have vanished and that men and women, who used to look evil and cruel to her, have suddenly grown "good and kind, free and sincere." She says that, as she was traveling through a city, she heard a sweet sound ringing through the air, a sound which all the people in the city ran out of their houses to hear too. She hid in a fountain and, as she watched, saw the people transformed as though "some foul disguise had fallen" and "all things put off their evil nature."

The Spirit of the Earth describes the transformation that has taken place in both nature and humanity as a result of Prometheus's release and Jupiter's fall. Nature, which under Jupiter's tyranny became a hostile environment for mankind, complete with poisonous plants and insects, is now habitable and harmonious with the needs of men. The Spirit of the Earth's descriptions continue the metaphor of veils falling and love, kindness, freedom, and sincerity being newly revealed to humanity.

Asia returns the Spirit of the Earth's affection and tells her that they will not separate until the "frozen and inconstant moon" thaws and looks on the Earth with warm light.

The strength of Asia's love promises to achieve an impossible feat: to turn the Moon from a dead to a living planet. This insinuation of new life springing from death continues the use of Christian allegory in the poem.

The Spirit of the Hour returns and tells them that, after he had blown the shell over the world, a change immediately occurred as if love "had folded itself round the sphered world." The Spirit of the Hour tells them how he has wandered the Earth and seen that "thrones" are now "kingless," and that men no longer lie or flatter each other or seek power. Instead they are "frank and kind" and free "from custom's evil taint." They speak "with wisdom" they once would not even have been able to think of. The images of worldly power stand "not overthrown, but unregarded" and the monuments of power mold and rot.

The Spirit of the Hour observes the same rejuvenation of love among humanity that the Spirit of the Earth has witnessed. The fact that a shell being sounded like a horn heralds this love connects love to the classical goddess Venus. Symbols of worldly power, such as the "thrones" from which kings rule, are now empty. This suggests that traditional hierarchies (like the Monarchy that Shelley detested) have broken down. Shelley also demonstrates his belief in non-violent resistance to power, as kings have not been violently overthrown but have simply been forgotten. For Shelley, this demonstrates real social progression as opposed to violent revolution, which breeds tyranny. Social custom has also broken down, which means that people can speak honestly and freely, rather than withholding their opinions for the sake of conformity or etiquette. Shelley disliked social conventions that restricted personal expression.

ACT 4

Panthea and Ione are sleeping outside Prometheus's cave. They wake to hear a chorus of spirits passing by. These are the dead Spirits of the Hours holding a funeral for the King of the Hours. The spirits of the elements unite with them in a chorus, which is also joined by the "Spirits of the human mind." They rejoice that love is no longer "veiled" and that they now live in "splendor and harmony." A new age has dawned on earth—"a Heaven where yet Heaven never could be"—which is free from "death, chaos, and night." This age is "called Promethean."

The fall of Jupiter has led to the death of time. Humanity is now no longer bound to the conventional passage of time, and death has been triumphed over and is no longer a source of grief. Unity between nature and humanity is symbolized by the "spirits of the human mind" and the elements dancing together. "A Heaven where Heaven never could be" suggests the Christian idea of the Kingdom of God being made on Earth after the final judgement, when evil and death will be ultimately defeated.

The spirits disappear but their song continues to spread through the world in "Aeolian modulations." Panthea and Ione see a small, floating islet, around which a sleeping infant, the Spirit of the Earth, is being borne in a basket. They see a vision of all the emblems of power and tyranny in the world abandoned, sunk to the bottom of the sea and forgotten, as if they had never existed.

"Aeolian modulations" refers to a musical instrument, known as the aeolian harp, which was commonly used as a symbol of artistic creation by the Romantic poets. It relates to classical mythology because Aeolus was the god of the winds, and the aeolian harp produces sound when the wind blows through it. The Romantics frequently use this as a metaphor for the influence of nature on poets. Ione and Panthea see a vision of the forgotten symbols of worldly power, which are now considered worthless.

The Earth is frenzied with joy over the change that has come over her. The Moon, conversing with the Earth, confesses that she feels the change too and that it "penetrates her frozen frame." The Moon feels her frozen surface turned to "living fountains" as a spirit of the Earth bursts out from her and sets plants and flowers growing on the Moon. The Moon exclaims that it is "love, all love!" The Earth and the Moon are joined by this spirit and the Earth rejoices that man is transformed into a "chain of linked thought" which can no longer "be divided," and that all "familiar acts are beautiful through love."

The Earth's transformation is so powerful that it extends to the Moon, bringing the infertile, dead planet, back to life so that water begins to flow on her surface and plants begin to grow. The Moon recognizes that this change has taken place through love. This change has also produced total harmony among mankind so that they no longer think as divided individuals but as one, harmonious collective that acts with wisdom and love.

Panthea and Ione rise when they hear the voice of the Demogorgon addressing the world. The Earth and the Moon, voices from nature, humanity, and the spirits of the living and the dead all reply that their "great Republic hears." The Demogorgon announces that the spirit of "Love, from its awful throne of power" now rules the world and "bars Destruction's strength." The Demogorgon informs the world that if "the serpent" of destruction should ever be unleashed on the world again, compassion, forgiveness, and defiance of power are "the spells by which to reassume an Empire over the disentangled doom" and to lead man back to "Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory!"

The use of the word "Republic" reflects Shelley's hopes that republics based around individuals who rule themselves will replace absolute monarchies. The passage gestures to the way that Shelley was influenced by the formation of the Republic of France during the French Revolution. Love's throne is described as "awful" because it is so powerful that it is all consuming and nothing can withstand its power. This is different from tyranny, because love allows knowledge and freedom prosper. The serpent symbolizes destruction, hatred, and violence, and once again refers to the character of Satan, who appears as a serpent in the biblical Book of Genesis. Although it is not certain that the world will maintain its state of harmony, the Demogorgon makes it clear that love will triumph over hatred, and that love is the path back from these negative emotions if they ever enter the world again.

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